

VÇ«rÃ°r Inn VerÇ«ld SvÃ-Ã°a

by words-with-dragons

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Summary: "Some men just want to watch the world burn." ["Toothless!" he screamed. The dragon cried out in the distance.] An annual get together of the Viking tribes on Berk soon turns into much more. Post-movie. Disregards GotNF. Slight Hiccup/Astrid. Rated T for safety. {CHAPTER SIX IS ON THE WAY}

## 1. Prologue: Fire

VÇ«rÃ°r Inn VerÇ«ld SvÃ-Ã°a

\_Some men just want to \*\*watch the world burn\*\*\_

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><p><em>Prologue:<em>

\_Fire\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Fire brings only destruction and pain. It forces those of us burdened with its care to walk a razor's edge between humanity and savagery. Eventually, we're torn apart."<em>

\* \* \*

><p>The very first thing a Viking learned in life was that fire was dangerous. Fire was bad. Fire was what came from dragons' mouths or coated their bodies and it should be avoided by all costs.<p>

Hiccup had seen the burns on other Vikings from past battles, heard the gruesome stories that the other Viking children found delight in, declaring they would get the best burns out of everyone, a badge of courage...

He worked daily with fire. He knew what burns felt like, small ones, mind you, but he knew the pain, especially at his early days at the forge. But despite all that, despite the fact it burned down his house and many others at least once a week, he didn't fear fire like the others did, or at least hid that they did behind loud boasts.

He found beauty in the fire, in its crackling and its way of breaking wood, reducing even the mightiest, largest pieces to crumbled ash within minutes. He found he liked staring at candles and roaring fires, found fascination, found comfort in fire.

It was reinforced when he found Toothless. Fire didn't bother dragons, and it didn't bother him. Just another similarity between him and dragons that was tacked onto the long list of things that were odd about him.

Hiccup found, even after he almost died due to the flames, that he didn't fear fire. Fire was warmth, it helped them survive even the most brutal of winters. It was necessary to life.

But fire cannot be contained, not even by a dragon. It will rage and spread and burn everything in its path. Turn dreams and hopes into nothing but ash that floats away on the wind.

But he could control it, keep it at bay. It had not gotten out of hand. Hiccup did not fear fire.

Yet.

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><p><strong>AN: This shorter, since this is the prologue. The next chapters will be nice and long - at least 5,000 words with 1/5 of chapter three already written. This story will be updated every other week. The title is Old Norse for the bold part of the quote above - it was translated to the best of my ability. The second quote is from the anime, "Avatar: The Last Airbender".\*\*

## 2. Arrival

VÇ«rÃ°r Inn VerÇ«ld SvÃ-Ã°a

\_Some men just want to \*\*watch the world burn\*\*\_

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><p><em>ACT I: embers<em>

\_1: Arrival\_

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><p><em>This, is Berk.<em>

Ships with brightly coloured sails " mostly red " were boxed into the harbor of the island that appeared to be a forest springing up out of the churning gray sea. The fierce wind made the boats rock, and carried the loud and excited voices of the people below to the dragon riders above.

\_Before our six-month, spleen-freezing winter, an annual get together between the six Viking tribes of the Barbaric Archipelago is starting. This year, it's being held on Berk. Since us Vikings are oh so creative, we call it a Thing.\_

A lanky, skinny teen with a freckly face and mop of auburn hair stood on the docks next to a huge man with a large red beard. "Stand up straigh' Hiccup," the man said, looking at him quickly before turning back to the horizon.

\_Hiccup's a great name, I know. But at least my dad says it with pride in his voice now.\_

Hiccup hurriedly tried to adjust his posture, but his father had already strode forward to shake the hand of another large man who had just walked out of one of the ships. The man had a dented helmet and a large, braided blond beard. "Stoick!" the man greeted, chuckling.

"It's good ta see yeh again Knuck," Stoick said cheerily. "An' of course yeh know my son Hic'up."

Stoick clapped a hand on the young teen's shoulder, which made his knees " well, knee buckle.

"I can see by tha leg tha' tha stories are true," Knuck said, gesturing to the metal and wooden prosthetic that replaced the majority of Hiccup's left leg. "Yeh'll have ta tell me tha full story some time. Can never be sure how reliable tha trader's tales are, yeh know?" He gave Hiccup a wink.

\_Knuck was the Chief of the Mangy Muttonhead tribe, our closest neighbours. He was alright, pretty nice and had a good sense of humour. His son, however, makes Snotlout look like a saint.\_

Hiccup internally groaned as a tall, wide teenager with stubble and dark, slanted eyes pulled up beside Knuck. Blond hair was pulled into a short braid in the back, and there was a brown fur cape wrapped around his shoulders.

"It's been quite a while, hasn't it Hiccup? Berk's changed so much," Knuck's son, Gringuts said. He grinned, revealing two rows of yellow, crooked teeth. A couple were missing.

\_The war with the dragons had ended roughly five months ago. The dragon-integration into Viking life hadn't gone completely smooth, and it still wasn't. Some Vikings still didn't like dragons. However, nobody was throwing their axes or ripping people to shreds with their claws. And everyone agreed it was better than when it had been kill or be killed.\_

However, the last time Hiccup had seen Gringuts had been when the older boy was shoving him into the mud, and what had been said didn't have a tone that was too friendly, so Hiccup uneasily returned the smile, unsure of what to say.

Their fathers were already walking down the docks, surely wrapped in a conversation about trading and weaponry, since Knuck had tapped the hilt of the long sword strapped to his left side.

Thankfully a distraction came in the form of a Monstrous Nightmare landing next to them. Vikings grumbled at the smaller space to fit their wide bodies through as Hiccup's cousin Snotlout leaped down from the saddle.

"You should go help the others Hookfang," Snotlout said. Many multi-coloured dragons were flying overhead, taking cargo to the Meade Hall where all the Vikings were congregating.

Hookfang gave his rider a pointed look and huffed "don't tell me what to do!" but flew off and started to do the task anyway.

After the short and obligatory greetings between Snotlout and Gringuts had been exchanged, Snotlout turned to his cousin. "Astrid said Toothless is looking for you" I think he's at the Meade Hall."

Hiccup sighed "his father had made him leave his dragon, Toothless at home. But Toothless was just too curious and well, Vikings probably wouldn't have the best reaction to him being around them. Some of Berk's villagers still shouted "Night Fury! Get down!" when the duo flew back home from their evening lap around the island.

"Great," Hiccup muttered. "Gringuts, can we head to the Meade Hall now? My dragon's there and well..."

"Of course," Gringuts replied, eyeing him warily. The three teens started to walk among the throng of Vikings. "Hiccup, is it true your dragon is a Night Fury?"

"Yes he is," Hiccup said, with a bit of pride coming into his voice. The most powerful dragon was his best friend after years of being seen as nothing more than a screw-up, the most powerful dragon preferred his company over everyone else's. He couldn't help the small smile that came to his face.

"He's not as cool as my Monstrous Nightmare though," Snotlout bragged and continued to talk Gringuts' ear off. Hiccup remained silent, happy to stay out of the conversation, and concentrated on walking.

It had been five months, but he still hadn't fully adjusted to his new leg. Gobber had said it took a while depending on the person, or the limb. For the blacksmith's right leg, it had taken a year. For his left arm, it had taken only a few months.

Hiccup carefully walked over a large tree root that had woven itself out onto the path. He did not want to trip, not without Toothless there to catch him.

Dumb dragon, Toothless was going to get himself hurt one of these days "a bad scenario of what could be waiting at the Meade Hall flashed through Hiccup's mind and he sped up, going ahead of the other two boys.

Within five minutes, they had reached the Meade Hall. Hiccup quickly scanned the crowd, looking for the black dragon that had become so

familiar to him, but there was no sign of Toothless.

\_Stupid, useless reptile, \_he thought and rolled his eyes in annoyance.

Hiccup slightly snapped his fingers when he realized where his dragon must have gone and groaned. "Snotlout, can you take Gringuts to the Meade Hall â€" I gotta go find my dragon â€" Gringuts you don't mind do you?"

As heir to the Hairy Hooligans, Hiccup was supposed to take Gringuts personally to the Meade Hall since the Mangy Muttonheads were the first to arrive. The other tribes would arrive sometime over the next three days.

But he didn't wait for an answer as he quickly pushed through the bustling crowd and into the dense forest of Berk.

"Odd, isn't he?" he heard Gringuts say.

"You don't know the half of it," Snotlout was saying, his voice becoming fainter. "This one time..."

Hiccup didn't get to nor care to hear the rest of the story. Luckily, he knew \_exactly \_where his dragon had gone.

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The young Viking carefully let himself weave around the boulders and duck the low-hanging branch that fell in between them, entering into the familiar scenery of the Cove. The birds that had made their nest in the beginning of autumn were gone, and the water was still.

Hiccup slowly scaled down the boulders onto the short bristles of grass, looking for his pesky dragon. But he was nowhere to be seen â€" the Night Fury must have been hiding. But Hiccup knew he had come to the right place.

This was \_their\_ place. If Toothless wasn't where he should be, or for that matter, if Hiccup wasn't, they were always here instead.

"Toothless," Hiccup grumbled. "When I get my hands on you... I'm going to get in so much trouble..."

Stoick would not be pleased if he realized his son wasn't with Gringuts.

Hiccup walked towards the large pond when he felt a slight rush of air behind him and turned around, seeing Toothless leap down from on top of the boulders where the boy had stood moments ago.

"Why did you come here?" Hiccup said, annoyed.

Toothless let out a soft whine, and Hiccup's annoyance vanished. He gave the dragon a scratch on the chin and a small smile. "I know we haven't gotten to spend a lot of time together this past week bud â€"

dad's been keeping me busy." Hiccup sighed.

And Hiccup had fought his dad on it too, but Stoick hadn't budged. \_"You're going to be chief one day. The annual Thing is important to uphold. It helps keep the peace between the tribes."\_

"Don't you worry, all the tribes will be gone within two week and it'll be just you and me bud," he promised. "And we'll have lots nice, long flights."

He pet Toothless' soft nose and then went to climb on top of the saddle, but the Night Fury moved away.

"What is it bud?" Hiccup asked. Toothless wiggled his hindquarters, his tongue lolling out in excitement. Hiccup groaned. "Toothless, no, we don't have time to play tag."

Hiccup moved forwards, but again Toothless playfully leaped away. "Toothless, come here!" he snapped.

Toothless tilted his head in an innocent way, but his smug expression said otherwise. \_Catch me if you can! \_The black dragon ran away, looking back at his rider happily.

Hiccup rolled his eyes and then checked his prosthetic. After making sure it was strapped in place properly, he bolted after his dragon. Although Toothless could have made it completely impossible for him, the dragon never ran too fast, always running at a speed that left Hiccup near his tail. Somewhere between the panting and running, Hiccup found himself laughing, roaring with it when Toothless shot a gummy smile at him and almost tripped.

When Hiccup felt drained however, he sat down and slipped off his prosthetic, gently rubbing the throbbing stump. Toothless came over to nuzzle him, their rambunctious game of tag forgotten. The dragon made a soft rumble of concern.

Hiccup pet the dragon, grateful for the concern. "The stump's just a bit sore. Now can we go the Meade Hall?"

His metal leg clicked into the stirrup easily and the duo flew up into the air, gliding over the trees. The wind pushed Hiccup's hair back from his face, and although he knew there was no way his father, hadn't noticed his absence, he found he couldn't care.

He hadn't realized just how much he had missed spending carefree time with Toothless, and no matter the lecture or punishment his father handed out, it was worth it.

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"Hic'up!"

As the lanky teen hopped off the dragon, he turned to see Gobber hobbling towards him. "Yer father's been lookin' everywhere for ya! Now git in tha hall â€" he refused ta star' tha meetin' wit'out ya."

Gobber herded him into the crowded Meade Hall, the villagers of Berk and the Mangy Muttonheads illuminated by the fire crackling in the fire pit.

Toothless went to follow him, but he heard Gobber say, "Nu-uh, no dragons allowed I'm 'fraid. Chief Knuck's request. Yeh'll have ta wait outside Toothless."

The large doors shut behind the blacksmith. Both of the amputees made their way towards Stoick, who was glowering at his son, the loudest sound in the hall the thud and clank of their respective prosthetics. The crowd around them whispered. Standing next to Knuck, Gringuts had a wide smile.

"We'll decide a punishment later," Stoick hissed to his son.

Then he loudly cleared his throat. "Now tha' my son is finally here, tha meetin' can officially begin. Wit' tha war wit' tha dragons being over, tha tradin' between our two tribes can be done more easily than ever. Dragons are able ta travel much faster than boats, an' we can use saddle bags ta transport goods."

"Tha' sounds reasonable," Chief Knuck said slowly. "Do yeh think yeh could 'ave tha operation ready by spring?"

Stoick nodded. "It should be doable."

Hiccup saw Mel, the local tanner and leather maker, gulp. They would mean a lot of work for him over the winter. His family, whom were all short and stocky and leather makers like him, stood beside him. His wife squeezed his hand and Mel smiled.

"However, I wan' ta see tha dragons in action first. How well they listen an' how fast they are an' all tha'."

"Of course. My son can demonstrate wit' his Night Fury. They're tha fastest dragon ya know." Stoick herded Hiccup out of the Meade Hall, followed by the Hooligans and at least twenty Muttonheads, not including the chief, his fair-haired wife and his son.

Hiccup almost tripped over Toothless, who had curled up next to the doors, dozing until his boy knocked into him. The dragon quickly stood up to catch him.

"Thanks bud," he told Toothless quietly. The duo walked down the stairs, the other villagers remaining on the platform outside of the Hall.

Hiccup climbed aboard the saddle, wiggling his good foot into the stirrup, his other clinking into place. "Now let's show them what dragons can do, eh Toothless?"

Toothless' wings spread out, and the Muttonheads oohed and awed. The Night Fury shot into the air like a rocket, spiralling into the clouds with ease. They swooped back down, doing a loop-de-loop.

Three plasma blasts came from Toothless' mouth to form faint purple targets they successfully and quickly flew through before soaring up in the air, even higher than before. Hiccup unlatched himself from

the safety grip on the saddle and jumped off; the two fell through the air, both grinning.

Hiccup wormed his way back onto the saddle as Toothless flipped over onto the proper side for him to do so. The Viking's prosthetic went in and the tail fin fanned out; they glided over the Meade Hall.

Toothless landed gently in the same spot they had been standing in before. Slightly breathless, Hiccup got off the saddle. The entire crowd, even the Hairy Hooligans, who saw them fly regularly, erupted into cheers. Hiccup looked for his father, who was smiling and gave him a short nod of approval.

Chief Knuck was beaming, and even Gringuts was clapping, but he had an odd expression. It was almost... hungry.

Hiccup forgot all about it as Knuck came over and clapped on the shoulder. "Fine work m'boy, tha' was amazin'. May I see tha dragon up close?"

"Sure, just give me a minute." He pet Toothless' nose and bent down so they were at eye level. "Now bud, I know you don't like new people being really close to you. But this man's okay. So can you be all nice for him?" Toothless' eyes narrowed and he snorted, but tilted his head like nod. "Thanks bud. Extra fish tonight."

"Go ahead, just be gentle. And one at a time," Hiccup said to Knuck and to the other eager Muttonheads behind him. Knuck looked at Toothless with awe, slowly reaching out a hand to touch Toothless' flank.

Hiccup could see Toothless' claws dig into the ground a little more, resisting the urge to flinch, but he stayed nice and still, even as the other villagers slowly approached.

"So you did train it," Gringuts said softly. His dark eyes were wide, lips pulled into the smallest smile. He reached out a hand to touch Toothless' snout, but the dragon made a low growl and he quickly moved his hand away.

Hiccup knew why: that was something he, and only he, was allowed to do. Nobody else had ever touched Toothless on the snout besides Hiccup since that day in the cove. And Toothless didn't plan on changing that rule anytime soon.

The Viking scratched his dragon lightly under the chin, in the dragon's sweet spot. His low growl turned to a content purr instantly. "It's okay bud." He turned to face Gringuts. "And yes, I really did befriend \_him.\_"

"Well, I doubt the other dragons and their riders are as impressive as \_him\_, but I would love to meet them," Gringuts replied.

Hiccup's eyes narrowed slightly. Gringuts had seen the tail fin, surely knew that Hiccup had done roughly half the work. Which made one thing clear: he would always be Hiccup the Useless in Gringuts' eyes. As if sensing his rider's distress, Toothless nudged his hand, placing his nose under it. Hiccup's lips twitched upwards.

"Of course," he said curtly. He looked up to Knuck, who was still looking at Toothless with as much awe as before. "Chief Knuck, would you like to see all the riders in action at the Dragon Training Academy?"

"A fine idea Hic'cup m'boy, lead tha way," the Chief said heartily.

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It only took a few minutes to reach the Dragon Training Academy. Shortly after waking up, Hiccup's father had given him the old Kill Ring to use for a dragon training school. The older dragons who knew what the place was were still uneasy in it, but the younger, wild ones had no trouble with it. The younger, and older, children and teens were taught here; Astrid had some of the young kids in class with her right now.

Much to her displeasure, Astrid had been tasked with teaching a class about Nadders even though the Muttonheads and the some of the traders were coming into today. But she seemed to have gotten it over as she spoke enthusiastically to the ten or so children, all of them around ten or eleven years old. Her own Nadder, Stormfly, was resting near to her in the arena with one yellow eye open.

"Right this way," Hiccup said as he led Knuck and Gringuts into the Academy. Astrid paused in her speech about Nadder's grooming habits and brushed her bangs out of her eyes.

"Kids, this is Chief Knuck of the Mangy Muttonheads," she told them, and gave Knuck a respectful nod. He smiled at her.

"I can see this dragon trainin' academy's been put ta good use t'en," he said cheerily. "Is tha' yer Nadder in tha corner?"

Astrid walked over and pet Stormfly's nose. "Yes she is. Stormfly, c'mon girl, get up." The dragon got to her feet, shaking out her wings. Her students "oo"ed and "aw"ed. "Anything you want to know in particular, Chief Knuck?"

"I think a flight demonstration would be interestin'," he said. Astrid smiled.

"With pleasure." Stormfly waddled out of the arena through the traditional exit and the two quickly took to the air. Astrid showed off some of her tricks, which were pretty cool. Stormfly landed neatly back to the ground and Astrid leaped off the saddle and led her blue and yellow dragon back into the arena. She scratched the Nadder lightly under the chin.

"Good job girl," she said quietly. Knuck was clapping appreciatively, as were the students. Gringuts had a large smile on his face which only widened as he looked at Astrid, a little too long than normal, Hiccup noticed.

He felt a pang of annoyance but didn't do anything about it. He and Astrid weren't a couple - friends, but not a couple - and she was perfectly capable of stopping unwanted advances if she wished too.

But he couldn't push down the small voice that hoped she wished to.

"Very impressive," Knuck told her. "So, I suppose yer tha Nadder expert 'round here?"

"That's right Sir," she said with pride in her voice. Hiccup grinned. "Each of us teach the kids about the different dragons and classes. When these kids turn twelve, they'll get a dragon of their own. As it is, Hiccup's currently teaching some to fly for the first time this afternoon," she explained. She flashed Hiccup a quick grin.

Hiccup felt his stomach do a flip-flop.

"Master of the skies, eh Hic'up?" Stoick was beaming at the high praise from the other Chief.

It took him a couple of seconds to come back into reality. Hiccup gave Knuck a small smile. "I suppose so, Sir."

"He's being too modest. He controls Toothless' prosthetic tailfin - it's the only way Toothless can fly."

Knuck perked up at this. "Really? How interesting. Looks like a downed dragon ain't always a dead dragon."

"It's actually the reason we became friends in the first place," Hiccup told him, feeling uncomfortable. Talking about Toothless' disability made a lump form in his throat. He doubted the guilt over it would ever go away fully, especially not until he came out and told Toothless directly he had been the one to take away the dragon's ability of independent flight.

The past few months had been so busy, there hadn't really been a good time. Or at least that's what he had convinced himself. Truth be told, he was scared of how Toothless would react, scared to lose his first and best friend...

Hiccup cleared his throat. "When I teach the new students this afternoon, would you like to attend the lesson, Chief Knuck?"

Knuck clapped him on the shoulder - he staggered forward but the Chief hadn't noticed. Gringuts had, and shot him a nasty grin; Hiccup ignored him and instead pet Toothless' nose, for the dragon had let out a soft, concerned croon. "Tha's some'ing I would love ta see Hic'up. Consider me there m'boy." He turned towards his son and Stoick. "I think it's time we went back ta tha hall, don't yeh Stoick?"

"Of course Knuck," Stoick said warmly. "Hic'up, ya can stay here an' help Astrid wit' tha lessons if ya want. An' son, ya'll be doin' some extra work for Gobber." As far as punishments could go, this was a more mild one that Hiccup couldn't really complain about. He suspected the way that Knuck had been so impressed with Toothless had softened it.

The three Vikings left quickly and Hiccup and Astrid turned back to the eleven preteens on the floor, one of whom was staring at Toothless with awe. "Are ya sure we can't learn 'bout Night Furies instead Miss Astrid?"

Hiccup tried to stifle a laugh as Astrid frowned at the boy who had spoken. "Afraid not Jargon. And we're going back to Nadders." The messy hair boy pouted.

"Okay Miss Astrid." Jargon relented when her cold stare didn't waver.

Astrid smiled. "That's what I thought. Now back to Nadders - but this time you'll be getting some hands-on experience with Stormfly."

All of the kids, including Jargon, cheered.

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Hiccup stayed for the Nadder lesson, although he didn't intrude. Deadly Nadders were Astrid's expertise, after all, and she knew much more than he. He helped her keep the excitable ten and eleven year olds under control while she guided a few through acting around Nadders. Then, after a little while, the small groups of kids would rotate.

Luckily all of them were fascinated by Toothless, so they were content to stay quiet while he talked about his dragon and Astrid went through the motions of being a rider of Nadder.

After the last few stragglers had left the arena to go to the Meade Hall, Hiccup walked up to Astrid. "Good job today, with Knuck and the kids."

She smiled at him - his stomach did a somersault. "Thanks Hiccup. Having Toothless there definitely helped keep them occupied. I can't have them all crowd Stormfly - you know how it is," she said, giving her dragon an affectionate pat. Stormfly nuzzled her back.

"All too well," Hiccup replied. "Meatlug loves it though," he added. Just yesterday Fishleg's Gronkle had been playing with a swarm of kids just off the Academy while they waited for Snotlout to teach his lesson - he had been late, like always.

Astrid chuckled. "How are you feeling about the flying lessons?" she asked.

Hiccup shrugged. "Alright I guess. We won't be going too high, of course. A few of them are riding Nightmares, so that'll be interesting." Astrid nodded in agreement.

Hiccup was grateful that unlike the others, he didn't have regular lessons. He taught the flying lessons at least twice a week, and even then the others often chimed in to help with the kids who were riding their specific dragon. That was one perk of Toothless being the only Night Fury in Berk: more time for individual flying.

"How's your own flying been going?"

Hiccup grinned at her. "Really good actually. We've been trying to perfect this trick with loop-de-loops where I unlatch myself at the top and he catches me underneath but it'll mean some adjustments for

the tail-"

He rambled off, oblivious to his habit and deliriously happy.

Astrid smiled as she watched him talk excitedly and shared a knowing look with Toothless. \_He's always like this, \_the dragon seemed to tell her, although he too seemed to be smiling. She did her best to listen, but found herself tuning out when he started talking about his theory of aerodynamics, which she didn't understand a single bit.

When Hiccup paused to take a breath a few minutes later, she swooped in and said, "How about we head to the Meade Hall for some lunch?"

He nodded. "That sounds good." He looked at her, puzzled, when she got on top of Stormfly's saddle. Usually they walked.

"Race ya?"

He grinned and hopped on top of Toothless. "You're on."

They shot out of the Academy's exit.

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The twins had decided to come to the afternoon flying lesson, seeing as the majority of the new riders, kids - six out of ten - were riding Zipplebacks. All of whom, however, were a single rider with two heads, so they had to alter their advice a little. But it was still helpful, Hiccup had noted cheerfully, and nobody had fallen this time. Which was lucky, since Knuck had indeed come to watch the lessons happen.

"You all did well," Hiccup told the kids as they traveled back to the main path of the town from the Academy. Their Zipplebacks, Monstrous Nightmare and lone Gronkle walked beside, excitable as they were still fairly young dragons, but old enough to fly and behave properly. Most of the time, anyway.

"Thanks Master Hiccup," a girl said, named Nonta said. Her flaming orange hair was pulled into three horizontal braids, her Gronkle nudging her hand affectionately.

Hiccup smiled at her and made sure all of the kids and the dragons got back to their parents, or to the Meade Hall.

"I don't see why they don't call me Master Tuffnut," the Thorston twin brooded.

"I don't see why anyone would," Ruffnut replied. Tuffnut looked like he might have started a fight, but Ruffnut was cracking her knuckles and he didn't hit her.

"Still, why's Hiccup the only one to be called Master?"

"Well, isn't it obvious?" a voice said behind them. Hiccup stopped walking and even the twins slowed down to allow Fishlegs to catch up

with them. He took a moment to catch his breath and gave Hiccup a grateful smile. "As I was saying before, isn't it obvious? He's the best rider - the first one - and he has to control Toothless' tailfin while flying and he figured how to do it all by himself. The kids see him as the best; and he is."

Hiccup smiled uncertainly. "Gee Fishlegs, I wouldn't say I'm the best out of all of you... But thanks. And that does make sense, I guess." He walked with the other kids back towards the docks.

Toothless nudged his backside impatiently. While the others started to head down the docks to see the newest trader ship that had pulled into the harbor, Hiccup got into his saddle. Fishlegs looked back at him, confused, but then he said, "Going for a flight?"

"Yeah, Toothless and I have some catching up to do," Hiccup said simply. Toothless made a rumbling noise of agreement. "I'll be back in time to meet the other heir that's coming today though, don't worry." The Nutty Northmen would be arriving before sunset, and like with the Mangy Muttonheads, he needed to escort their heir, Norman, to the Meade Hall and 'entertain' him.

Toothless raised his wings to hit Hiccup lightly on the side of the head. "Yeah, yeah, we're going. See you later Fishlegs!" The duo were soon high in the air.

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They did loop-de-loops, although they didn't practice the trick they were working on. The Viking could potentially hurt himself, and had decided his dad wouldn't be too happy if he did - it had happened before, with other aerial tricks after all, and the other tribes coming would not help matters.

Usually, flying made all of his worries go away, for the flight at least, but seeing Berk up high among the clouds and all the ships in the harbor did the opposite. Toothless seemed to sense the worry building up in his stomach, and made his soft crooning noise. It broke Hiccup out of his stupor just in time; the tailfin fanned out and they missed the column of rock they had been gliding towards.

"Wha-? Oh sorry bud, I'm just distracted is all..." Hiccup sighed. "You know, it's still hard to adjust even though it's been almost half a year. I went from being a disgrace to being a hero overnight - Hel I was even disowned and then became a hero... And I'm not a hero - you did most of the work anyway -"

Toothless slapped him in the face with an ear-plate. \_Now what did I say about being down on yourself?\_

Hiccup almost smiled. "And it's been great, being accepted, the teens are my friends, real friends now. And of course, we can spend a lot more time together than before and I don't have to worry about anyone discovering you."

Hiccup looked back down at the boats. "But today, with Gringuts and the other heirs arriving - how much will it have changed with them?"

Or will they still treat me like I'm Hiccup the... Hiccup the Useless...?"

Toothless whined sadly. Hiccup had talked about his old position among the villagers before, back when their friendship was a secret, and the idea that 'Hiccup the Useless' had once been his boy's nickname made him sad and angry. If there was anything Hiccup wasn't, it was useless.

"Thanks for listening bud." Hiccup stroked the dragon's soft nose. Toothless' slimy tongue reached up to lick the boy's hand. Hiccup recoiled, disgusted, but he was laughing and Toothless grinned to himself.

Hiccup looked around - the sun was just beginning to dip towards the mountains. The Nutty Northmen would arrive soon. "Alright bud, let's go back to the docks."

The Night Fury descended through the clouds with a little more flair than perhaps necessary, but Hiccup couldn't complain.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

Norman was a gangling fifteen year old, with a narrow face and a huge nose. His feet and hands were too big for his body, and his dark hair that peeked out of his helmet was as greasy as ever. The actual boy wasn't that bad, and after Hiccup escorted him to the Meade Hall, he immediately found Ruffnut, whom he harbored a soft spot for. Ruffnut, however, wanted nothing to do with him, but couldn't throw him off no matter how many times she punched him.

At least it took him off Hiccup's hands. He didn't have much time to think about it however; Gobber kept him busy at the forge that evening.

The next day, mid-morning, as Hiccup helped Fishlegs rewrite the Book of Dragons - the whole thing had to be rewritten, as it was pretty much all about killing them, not training - per usual, the Angry Axemen arrived.

Their heir, Lenlos, was a large lump of a teen not unlike Fishlegs in appearance, but taller, and more muscular. Curly hair stuck out of his wide, lopsided helmet. While Gringuts had been the ringleader of the heirs when it came to bullying Hiccup, Lenlos had been the one to throw the most punches, and one black eye too many made Hiccup very irritable around him. Lenlos didn't seem to notice - did he notice anything? - and immediately went to hang out with Gringuts and Norman, who had finally given up on trying to woo Ruffnut.

Besides the occasional nasty grin or snide comment, Gringuts left him alone over the following days as they waited for the last tribe of the Barbaric Archipelago to arrive, and Hiccup was grateful.

Hiccup continued on with visiting the others with their dragon lessons and did two more flying lessons with some of the new riders so Chief Norbert of the Nutty Northmen and Chazor of the Angry Axemen could see dragon riding in action. In the evenings, Hiccup was forced to attend trading negotiations meetings between the Chiefs. The other

heirs were forced to attend as well.

At least, Hiccup thought happily, most of the day was his to do as he pleases. He and the other riders had some dragon races. He helped a woman figure out what was wrong with her dragon (it had eaten a rotten fish) and helped her fix the problem. He and Fishlegs got to roughly halfway through the first class of dragons in the Book. He and Toothless were always the first up to fly in the mornings and the last to come down in the evenings. Things were going well.

Neither Norman nor Lenlos nor Gringuts had aggressively approached him. It seemed as though he had been worried for nothing; they would, albeit a tad reluctant on Gringuts' part, go along with whatever the majority of Berk had decided.

It was a comforting thought as he and Toothless glided over the moon, the stars twinkling and the \_norÃ°rljÃ³s, \_waves of unbelievable colour, passing through the sky. The dragon rider knew he had to take advantage of what little time they had left before winter when their night flights would grow too cold to do. Toothless absolutely loved them, being a Night Fury and all, and Hiccup found an unexplained sense of peace. It was also a good way to help with his night vision as well.

"One last round before we head home?" Hiccup asked Toothless, grinning. His best friend said yes by putting on an extra burst of speed.

They did their lap around the majority of the island fairly slowly, as neither really wanted to go home. It gave the lanky teenager a good chance to observe the village below him. Many small, although now closed, stalls with canopy's on top of poles had been put up: traders hoping to sell their goods to a wider population of Vikings.

Then, a little while away from the village, was the Visitor Centre, a collection of twelve small houses that were always used whenever it was Berk's turn to host the Thing. The Chief and his intermediate family got one house to themselves, and whoever they had brought with them - usually twenty or so Vikings - stayed in the other two houses, as three houses were allotted to each tribe so it would be fair.

Just a few hills over was the Haddock house. Even though it was late, Hiccup could see a candle flickering in the windows. Stoick, looking over some official documents or something of the sort.

"Let's go in the sneaky way," Hiccup told Toothless; he didn't want to disturb his father unless it was necessary. Silently and perfectly, they maneuvered themselves into the Viking's room through the large window in it.

Hiccup quietly got up and undid Toothless' flying gear and took it all off, even the saddle. Although it was a hassle in the morning, the leather could rub against the Night Fury's scales, which was uncomfortable. Hiccup hung it all up on a hook near the stairs in his room that led down to the rest of the house.

He sat on his bed and removed his prosthetic as Toothless circled his large stone slab in the room and burnt the rock below him with fire

before resting happily. Hiccup set his metal leg beside his bed and then lay down and pulled the blanket over him.

"Goodnight bud," he whispered.

Toothless made a quiet, rumbling sound. \_Goodnight Hiccup.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>####<strong>

The last tribe was arriving today, and the whole village was abuzz with activity. The Big Brutes always brought the most people from their tribe and the traders were eager to restock all their supplies in their stalls, which meant a lot of trips between the small stalls and their ships in the harbor. The harbor had almost never been this full, Hiccup noted, flying above it in the early morning on this annual morning flight with Toothless.

The sun was still rising and fog was still thick around the island. The clouds were pink, shot with gold but were quickly fading away. Today would be a cloudless, yet windy day - almost perfect flying conditions. The best ones for free-falling, anyway.

The duo landed at the Meade Hall for breakfast. Most Vikings ate there, preferring to be cooked for themselves by their large team of bakers and chefs than make breakfast in their own home. All the visitors from the tribes ate here without question.

Dragons were allowed in during meal times, as long as they behaved, (Meatlug and Barf and Belch were no longer allowed, for obvious reasons,) so Toothless trotted after his rider into the Hall.

Even though it had been five months, every time Hiccup stepped into the Hall he found a surge of happiness at seeing the other teens sitting at a table, and knowing that he could sit and talk and laugh with them. That they were his \_friends.\_

He slid onto the bench next to Snotlout, who was enthusiastically ripping meat off a drumstick. "Enjoying yourself?" he teased. Snotlout scowled at him with a mouth stuffed with chicken and looked quite hilarious. Hiccup chuckled.

Toothless curled up around the table, his tail wrapped around his foot and prosthetic. Astrid slid the bowl of chicken over to him and Fishlegs handed him the pitcher of water. Hiccup gave them a smile of gratitude.

Lunch passed quickly as the twins recounted their Hideous Zippleback lesson's mishaps that had taken place this morning. The kids had been perfectly behaved, of course; the twins had been the ones who had blown stuff up. "The kids have potential for it," Tuffnut said thoughtfully. "We just have to help them get there."

"Please don't," Fishlegs whimpered. Snotlout laughed.

"Please do. But anyway, I'm excited for the Big Brutes to get here," Snotlout said, taking another bite of chicken. "Koza might finally realize what a good match we'll be."

Koza was the heir to the Big Brutes. Dark-haired, curvy and pretty-faced, her father Mosso would have no problem finding her a suitable, top-notch husband. Snotlout had failed to 'woo' her in all of the past years, and Hiccup highly doubted that anything would have changed her opinion of his cousin.

It wasn't unusual for Snotlout to hit on girls, but one thing Hiccup had noticed was that he didn't do so to Astrid as often anymore. Sure, there were suggestive comments here and there, but not nearly as much as Snotlout used to deliver them. Perhaps he was slowly picking up on the fact that she wasn't fact, whenever Hiccup or Astrid had gotten romantic attention from any of the younger or older Berkian teens, he would cast them quick grins. Hiccup still didn't know what to make of it, but it was embarrassing.

"Yeah I'm sure," Tuffnut said. "And then what'll happen? You'll go live on their island?"

Snotlout glared at him. "No way. She'd live here with me and Hookfang!"

"I'm sure that'll go over real well," Ruffnut added. The Thorstons continued to tease him and Fishlegs turned to Astrid and Hiccup.

"I think it would be interesting to interview some of the Zippleback riders. Most of the Zipplebacks only have one rider, so it would be good to add tips into the Book for future singular riders," he explained.

"Maybe we can talk to some of the students at n̥ttverr," Astrid suggested. "Does that work for you two?" Both boys nodded. She glanced towards the twins and Snotlout, whose argument was growing quite loud. It wasn't that the Vikings around them would hear, nor care - Vikings were always the loudest of the lot, but it was starting to grate on her nerves. "I don't know about you, but I'm going to see the traders down at the docks."

The trio (along with Toothless) walked out of the Meade Hall and down the steps. "Stormfly's been bugging me to get some new saddle leather," Astrid explained. "Spoiled dragon."

"At least you get to sleep in," Hiccup said. Astrid rolled her eyes.

"You love flying as much as Toothless does," she countered dryly. He grinned sheepishly. "That's what I thought."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>####<strong>

Two Big Brute ships - larger than any of the other tribes ships - were spotted on the horizon just before the sunset started.

Fishlegs, Astrid, Hiccup and by extension, Toothless, had spent the rest of the afternoon looking at the different traders at the docks and all the different stalls around town. Astrid had indeed found some nice leather and had already booked an appointment with Mel, the short and stocky local tanner and leather maker. Fishlegs had simply

browsed, being too indecisive to buy anything. Hiccup had purchased another new notebook as his old one was almost finished, and some new charcoal for pencils. And at Toothless' begging, a special type of fish that the spoiled reptile had quickly gobbled up.

The three friends and one dragon waited at the docks as the rest of the Vikings came down as well to greet the Big Brutes. Snotlout, Tuffnut and Ruffnut eventually joined them as the ship started to come into the harbor.

"Still going to try to win Koza over?" Astrid teased, grinning at the look of discomfort that passed over Snotlout's face. He gulped.

"I've recently realized the advantages of being single," he said, trying to sound suave but completely failing. He quickly regained his composure and quirked an eyebrow at Astrid. "Unless you're interested." The blonde rolled her eyes.

Stoick came up from behind and put a hand on Hiccup's shoulder. "We should be right down there ta greet 'em son," he said.

"See you later guys," he told the others before allowing his dad to steer him away.

"Later," the other teens echoed. Toothless started to wordlessly follow him, but Stoick turned to the dragon.

"No dragons, I'm 'fraid. Ya can stay wit' tha others Toot'less," Stoick said. Hiccup sighed; stupid, visitor-meeting protocol, but nodded at Toothless, and although clearly reluctant, Toothless obeyed and stayed with the teens.

"Now Hic'up, wit' tha way things have changed, Koza might treat ya dif'rently than before, ya know?" Stoick said awkwardly, clearly struggling for words. "An' well, don't get too caught up in tha'. Remember how she was before."

The idea that his father was implying - that he might actually be interested in Koza! - made him start laughing so hard his cheeks hurt within seconds. Stoick looked confused. "Son?"

"Thanks for the advice dad, but you don't need to worry about that," he told his father, still slightly chuckling.

Koza might have been almost as pretty as Astrid, but he knew from experience that she had none of Astrid's warmth, or humour, and those were the things he appreciated the most in their friendship. Koza was shallow and two-faced and Hiccup would never forget that, even if she did treat him differently.

Stoick was evidently relieved, judging by the look on his face. "Glad ta hear it son. Just wait a few years an' ya'll an' Astrid might be somethin'..." And the awkwardness had come back.

Hiccup groaned; this was not the direction he wanted this conversation to take. "Dad - please, you don't have to talk anymore," he said, practically begging. Stoick chuckled.

"Glad ta hear tha' too."

They waited the rest of the in silence as the Big Brutes ships as the ships finally dropped anchor on the edge of the extremely full harbor. The Chief, Mosso, a short but beefy man with a long, braided mustache and a long scar running up one cheek, stepped out. Koza followed behind him. Her mother, as Hiccup had understood it, had died shortly after childbirth and Chief Mosso had never remarried.

"Stoick an' young Hic'up!" Mosso said, quickly shaking both of their hands. "An' my daughter Koza, it's been too long. We must hear all of tha stories while we're here, shouldn't we Koza?" He didn't give his daughter time to answer as he sped on, "An' I see tha' ya've been adjustin' well ta tha leg, wonderful!"

Mosso continued to chat excitedly as they went up the docks. Hiccup noticed Koza eyeing him, even batting her eyelashes at him, but steadily ignored her. Quite quickly, they reached the Meade Hall. Decorative lights that usually only used for Snoggletog had been hung and three tables had been put end to end, piled high with trays of food and meat and large mugs overflowing with beer.

"Let the celebration begin!" Stoick announced. The Vikings all cheered - all of the adults raised their mugs in a toast and then started a hearty chorus of songs.

Hiccup quickly found his friends, who were singing along gladly and dancing. Astrid ignored his protests ("Really, I can't dance,") and pulled him onto the dance floor. Soon he forgot that he 'couldn't dance' and forgot about his prosthetic, even found his stump didn't hurt as the hours wore on.

Tonight, happily surrounded by friends and away from the other heirs, nothing could bother him. It wouldn't last forever, he already could tell, but for tonight, it was enough. They would deal with whatever problems that came along with tomorrow later.

But tonight - tonight was perfect.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Hello. I decided to post this chapter, as I've been wanting to for a while and I would \_absolutely \_love some feedback on this.\*\*

\*\*Luckily for those who have become intrigued, not will all the chapters be, hopefully, as lengthy if not more so than this one, but there will also be regular updates, as half of Act I is almost finished (chapter 3 is 50% done). So, an update every other week unless something very odd comes about.\*\*

\*\*Tell me what you liked and disliked down below, or any suggestions of improvement for my writing style. If there are any small errors, that is entirely my fault, as I do not have a Beta.\*\*

\*\*Also, an important note, Astrid's role in the movie's been altered slightly. She never kisses Hiccup, cheek or otherwise. Instead, a smile or thank you in the cove, and a hug at the end. I feel like it's more in character and I'll be happy to explain why if anyone feels like having a discussion about it - however please be civil.

This way, not only is it better for her, but she and Hiccup have more time to really get to know one another as friends and build the mutual respect and trust that will be important for a romantic relationship later.\*\*

\*\*\_norǾrljǾ³s = \_\*\*\*\*is northern lights in Old Norse.

><em>nǾ;ttverǾr = <em>supper in Old Norse.

><strong>\*\*Unfortunately, there are no English-Old Norse direct translators I could find, but if you know of any, please leave a link in a review and I will very joyfully check it out.\*\*

\*\*Anyway, thank you for taking the time to read this. :)\*\*

### 3. Reminders

VÇ«rǾr Inn VerÇ«ld SvǾ-Ǿa

\_Some men just want to \*\*watch the world burn\*\*\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>ACT I: embers<em>

\_2: Reminders\_

\* \* \*

><p>The next morning, almost all of the adults were passed out in the Meade Hall, or else walking around in a post-drunken state full of headaches and vomiting. They did so with large smiles on their face, however, which was something Hiccup would never understand.<p>

He and Toothless had left the party when the moon was at the highest point in the sky, having enough of the noise. The others had headed home shortly afterwards, he had seen, as they glided over to the Haddock house.

The adults would be taking the day off from chores due to their post-drinking haze and Hiccup intended to make the most of the day by sleeping, since none of their parents would be telling them to do chores either.

Toothless had other plans.

The teen supposed he was lucky his father was sleeping in the Meade Hall, otherwise Stoick would have hollered at him because of the racket the Night Fury was making on their roof.

"Five more minutes..." Hiccup said feebly.

There was another loud stomp and then silence. Hiccup fell asleep again, but it seemed like only seconds later a wave of cold washed over him.

He jerked awake, shivering, seeing his blankets and furs in Toothless' mouth. The nerve of that dragon, pulling them off his bed. It wasn't the first time this had happened, and he knew it wouldn't

be the last, but he still glowered at his dragon.

"Give them back," he said groggily, still half-asleep, making a half-hearted attempt to grab them. Toothless made a whining noise that was muffled because of the blankets.

"Fine, fine, you win," Hiccup grumbled. He slid his prosthetic back on with ease out of habit and grumpily snatched his furs and blankets out of his dragon's mouth and put them back on his bed.

He walked down the stairs and out of the house, his brain feeling foggy, but as soon as they were flying through the sky, his mind cleared.

He let out a whoop as he unlatched himself from the safety latches of the saddle and jumped off. They freefell through the air. Toothless poked him slightly and it made him spin; he laughed loudly with pleasure.

How could sleeping in ever be better than flying, he wondered.

Toothless gave him a smug look, as if knowing exactly what he was thinking. "Oh shut up," Hiccup said, although he grinning.

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\* \* \*

><p>The dragon-rider pair, a few hours later, landed in front of the Dragon Training Academy. It was one of the days, three times a week, when none of the dragon riders had any lessons and with the adults out of commission, they could spend the day having races and doing whatever they wanted together.<p>

Or they could have, if Hiccup had not seen the four heirs of the tribes " Gringuts, Lenlos, Norman and Koza " walking towards the Academy as he and Toothless had flown over.

\_Great, \_Hiccup thought dryly, walking into the Academy. Astrid, Fishlegs and the twins were already there with their dragons. Snotlout and Hookfang, were as usual, late. The chalk board that they used for lessons had been pushed into one of the spare dragon pens so it would be out of the way.

"Hey Hiccup," Ruffnut greeted quickly, which Hiccup thought was odd, but then she hurriedly rushed on, "You gotta get Norman off my case, he's driving me \_crazy! \_Like, I want to blow stuff up even more than usual!"

"What's wrong with that?" her brother questioned, grinning.

She glowered at him. "Maybe you'll mind if it's your head!" She punched him in the face and soon they were rolling on the ground, scratching and grabbing at any part of each other they could yet, tugging at each other's long hair.

"Ruff, Tuff, stop!" Hiccup said. He didn't dare get too close for fear of being hit.

Astrid sighed in exasperation and walked over and pulled the twins apart. "Shut up!" she yelled, holding them by their shirt collars.. After making a few, futile attempts to restart the fight, both Thorstons pouted and stopped trying to hit each other. "Good. And you're not going to fight again, are you?"

Neither stubbornly answered. She gave them a little, rough shake. "\_Are you\_"

They both sighed and rolled their eyes. "No," they answered glumly.

Astrid seemed satisfied and let them loose. Barf and Belch's heads continued to keep them apart and eventually they were civil enough to stand beside each other.

Hookfang swooped into the ring a few moments later, Snotlout laughing loudly. "Isn't it great?" he crowed, hopping off his dragon. "No chores for an entire day!"

"It's pretty sweet," Tuffnut agreed. "Think of all the trouble we could get into..." Ruffnut nodded earnestly, her previous annoyance with her twin seemingly forgotten.

"I was going to interview the Zippleback riders, since we didn't get the chance at \_nÃ;ttverÃ°r\_," Fishlegs said. "Is anyone interested in coming along?"

"I was actually going to work on speed skills," Astrid said, scratching Stormfly under her chin. "I can't believe even Terrible Terrors are naturally faster." She shook her head, looking slightly disappointed. "Care to come along Hiccup?" She smiled at him.

Snotlout gave him one of those sly, knowing looks and Hiccup felt heat rise to his cheeks and shot him an annoyed look before turning to Astrid. "I would love to!" He said enthusiastically, perhaps a bit too enthusiastic, because Snotlout was grinning even more broadly than before. "I mean, sure." If Astrid had noticed anything odd, she didn't show it.

"You sure you're okay doing the research alone?" Hiccup asked, turning to Fishlegs.

"It's alright. Besides, I've been wanting some 'me' time anyway," the larger boy explained, sounding sincere, so Hiccup let it drop.

There wasn't any more time to discuss it however, as the four heirs had finally reached the Academy and walked through the gate.

The only dragon who had met all of them was Toothless, who was curled up near Hiccup, his broken tail lying near Hiccup's prosthetic and all of the others' dragons let out low, uneasy growls and rumbles. Their riders quickly quieted them down.

"Its okay girl," Fishlegs said, wrapping his arms around Meatlug to the best of his ability in a comforting hug.

Although still wary of the newcomers, Meatlug, Stormfly, Hookfang and

Barf and Belch didn't growl anymore, trusting their riders.

"What brings you to the Academy?" Astrid asked Gringuts, Lenlos, Norman and Koza. The dark haired girl was surveying the ring with interest, but her gaze lingered a little longer than it should have on Hiccup.

"Well, Gringuts had told me about your Night Fury and I just had to see it in person," Koza said, smirking at him and batting her eyes at him. "What its name?"

If Koza was trying to get on his good side, she wasn't doing a good job of it, he thought. "\_His \_name is Toothless."

She giggled, although he had no idea what she thought was funny. "Toothless? It â€" he clearly has teeth."

"They're retractable," he said, feeling slightly defensive. It wasn't the greatest name, he knew, but it belonged to his best friend. "Show her bud, and anyway, it started out as a nickname and then just sort of... stuck."

Toothless slid his teeth in and out and Koza reached out to pet him. Toothless growled warningly and she recoiled, fear flashing across her face.

"Not the friendliest dragon, is he?" she said, giving Toothless a look of disdain.

"Has a good reason for it," Astrid muttered, frowning. The blonde had never liked Koza, Hiccup knew that, but she seemed irritated by the attempts of flirting Koza was giving him. It made his heart flutter.

"I'm sure you could explain that, couldn't you Hiccup?" she said, giving an overdose of warmth that made it sound insincere, which he was sure it really was. "Tell me the whole story sometime?"

"I'd like to know how you tamed it as well," Gringuts added, smiling nastily. "I'm sure we'd all like to know, wouldn't we boys?" Norman and Lenlos hastily agreed.

"How much of the story do you know already, there may not be that much to tell," Fishlegs chimed in. Hiccup smiled at him gratefully.

Telling the story would mean explaining how he had downed a Night Fury and he was sure Toothless already suspected his hand in the dragon's crippling, and he wasn't sure he was ready to have that conversation yet. Or ever, if he was being completely honest with himself.

"I know that you found a wounded dragon in the woods and befriended it and helped it fly again, because it had lost part of its tail," Norman said. He winked at Ruffnut, who mimed gagging, causing Tuffnut to grin.

"And you were chosen to kill the Monstrous Nightmare but were brave enough to try to stand up for what you believed in," Koza said, sidling up to Hiccup. He quickly moved away; her face shifted into a

confused expression but soon it was gone.

"But your dad ruined it and found out about the nest, so he made your dragon take him and the others Vikings there. The huge ruler of the dragons almost killed them all, but you came and saved them," Norman continued.

"Heroically," Koza added.

"And in the battle you lost your leg, which is the only reason I believe the story," Gringuts finished. The tension, which had already been hanging in the air, was now so thick Hiccup could have cut it with a dagger.

Astrid narrowed her eyes. "What do you mean by that, Gringuts?" she said, feigning politeness but there was a dangerous edge to her words.

"Well, look at him â€" he's the same as before and I bet the dragon did all the work â€"

Toothless growled and picked himself up. Hiccup placed a hand on the Night Fury's snout. "Easy bud."

"â€" I mean, honestly, if it weren't for that dragon he would still be Hiccup the Useless â€"

Now even the twins looked mad and all five of the dragon riders were glaring at Gringuts, who seemed to have finally noticed how angry everyone looked. "What, you know it's true."

Hiccup, meanwhile, was thanking the gods he didn't get emotional easily, because Gringuts' last comment had hit a little too close to home and it felt like someone had just slapped him across the face.

Toothless nuzzled him while Astrid viciously verbally defended him, he found he had gone temporarily deaf to her words. It looked like Astrid, however, wanted to abandon her words and do nothing more than to grab her axe that had a place in Stormfly's saddle and start swinging it around.

\_If it weren't for that dragon he would still be Hiccup the Useless...\_

Hiccup swallowed hard, but seemed to have finally found what he wanted to say. "You know what Gringuts," he said quietly and despite all the noise everyone had turned to him, the ring instantly silent. "Maybe you're right. I had never done anything of worth before I met Toothless. Because then I was forced to act, because there was clearly more to them than anyone had realized. Without him, yeah, I would still be Hiccup the Useless, but from the moment I realized I couldn't kill him, I became a different person."

"You guys call him an it and you have no idea what it's like â€" he almost died saving me in the ring, he would have, if my father hadn't decided to speak with me first. So talk to me when you've had someone almost die on your account."

He knew if he kept talking he would end up crying. He needed to get

out of here and he felt as though he had said enough, judging by everyone's shocked faces, he had.

With that, Hiccup stormed out of the Academy, Toothless growling at Gringuts the whole time until he had caught up with his rider. Wordlessly, Hiccup mounted the dragon and they shot into the sky.

Astrid watched him go, frowning. Then, she glowered at Gringuts. "I think you should leave our Academy. Now."

After making sure Gringuts had left, Astrid didn't even look at her friends or the remaining heirs as she climbed onto Stormfly's saddle. "Fishlegs, you're in charge."

The Deadly Nadder climbed into the sky easily and soon the ring was a dot on the ground. Astrid urged her dragon faster, towards the woods.

She had a friend to talk to.

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\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup hadn't even needed to tell Toothless where to go; the Night Fury had flown directly to the Cove and Hiccup instantly found peace in the surroundings.<p>

But there was still a lump in his throat. It wasn't something he had thought of often, but he supposed, without Toothless, he was useless. Maybe even more so than before, since he couldn't even walk properly now, or run as fast.

Toothless bumped his arm, trying to provide comfort, but Hiccup found it wasn't working. It was just like he had feared. He was useless. Take away his dragon, and he was useless...

Gringuts was right.

If Gringuts wasn't, then why had the other heirs always been able to hit him as many times as they liked? Why had Gringuts always managed to shove him into the ground? Why hadn't he ever been able to fight back of his own accord, and win? Why had their parents turned a blind eye to his mistreatment, viewing him as a spare, because Snotlout was most likely going to become chief?

If Gringuts wasn't, then why did he know with certainty, that if he had never discovered the truth about dragons, he would have remained a screw-up in the eyes of the village till the day he died?

Why was all he was ever going to be seen as was useless?

It was then, when he was wishing, for what exactly, he didn't know, that Toothless perked up and looked towards one of the Cove's many entrances. Astrid was standing there, looking hesitant.

After a few moments of careful consideration, he waved his hand slightly which he knew she took as a sign she could come down. She was the only person who had come to the Cove beside him, and knew it

was a private place for him and his dragon.

Stormfly trotted behind her, chirping happily at Toothless, who made a sullen, rumbling noise. Astrid sat beside Hiccup, not saying anything for a while.

"Gringuts is an idiot," she said simply.

"Yep."

"What you said back there â€" that was beautiful."

Hiccup didn't respond for a while, but when he did he figured she had been expecting the question. "Astrid, if I hadn't met Toothless, would I still be Hiccup the Useless?"

It took her a moment to answer. "No," she said finally and it took him by surprise. "No. You were never Hiccup the Useless to begin with. You were just different. I'm sorry I never saw that before, never wanted to look beyond what I saw. But that's what's great about you Hiccup. You ask questions and you push boundaries and even though it was annoying, it's what ended the war. You are better with Toothless beside you, but you always had the right stuff in you from the beginning."

Hiccup started to smile. "Thanks Astrid."

"Well, isn't this what friends do?"

"Yeah. I guess it is." He smiled at her and then stood up. "But if it's alright with you, I'm going to go flying. Wanna come?"

"Is Gringuts an idiot?"

Hiccup laughed and they got onto their dragons together.

\*\*\*\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>The rest of the day passed nicely. He and Astrid had multiple races and eventually went to the Meade Hall, which was just beginning to be cleared out of the adults, for lunch. The twins, Fishlegs and Snotlout sat with them and no one said a word about what had happened earlier. Unusual and unheard of tact had come into play and Hiccup was grateful.<p>

He didn't see Gringuts for the rest of the day.

He wished that the Mangy Muttonheads weren't Berk's closest neighbours, weren't part of the \_J\_\_Ç«\_\_ru-f\_\_Ã|\_\_gir Askr \_tribe alliance. There were enemy tribes, like the Silent Slayers, where runts like himself were left on the mountains to die. All of the babies were, and only those that survived were raised. Despite their harsh practice, they were still a large tribe that scared most of the Barbaric Archipelago.

Hiccup knew even his father found them worrisome, and that was something.

The Silent Slayers were actually the reason the \_J\_Ç«\_\_ru-f\_\_Ã|\_\_gir Askr \_had been formed in the first place. There were multiple tribes in the Barbaric Archipelago, and the Hairy Hooligans hadn't been one of the most favoured two hundred years ago, due to the dragon-war clogging up trading options.

But they had fearsome warriors, and the alliance was created so that if one tribe was attacked, the others would help. All of the tribes had pretty much been immune to war between tribes outside of the \_J\_Ç«\_\_ru-f\_\_Ã|\_\_gir Askr\_ since then.

Now, with the way Berk had changed overnight, Hiccup knew the peace-treaties between tribes would be altered as well. For better. Or for worse.

Not for the first time, Hiccup was thankful he wasn't the chief yet and by the time he was, most of these issues would have sorted out. Negotiating with Gringuts every year though? Hiccup made a face. Yeah, that sounded like a great time.

It couldn't bother him too much as he and Toothless did another lap of the island that night. His island and tribe were safe due to the alliance and even if he hated Gringuts, it was still an important alliance to maintain.

And anyway, tomorrow, life would be back to normal. He could put the awful morning's events behind him.

Chores would have to be done, which was a nuisance, but as long as Toothless was there, Hiccup didn't really care. Besides, working with Gobber in the forge was fun, most of the time.

It was with a bright outlook that he settled down to sleep that night.

\*\*\*\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Now normally, Hiccup didn't get many nightmares. The ones who used to get for the first couple of months after the battle with the Red Death had finally left his system roughly three months ago.<p>

But he got one that night.

\* \* \*

><p><em>He was standing in a forest, off to the side of a clearing where there was a bunch of young kids playing. Peeking through the thick clumps of leaves, he recognized himself, probably only four years old.<em>

\_Hiccup's eyes were rimmed with red and a few children - most of whom were older - were playing keep-a-way with his helmet. "Give it back!" he demanded. The oldest - Gringuts at eight years old - boy's dark, slanted eyes with alight with mirth.\_

\_Gringuts walked towards the tree where he was hidden, and he peeled

away but could see his younger self's helmet being hurled up in the air and landed on one of the high tree branches. "Go get it if you're Viking enough!" Gringuts said, laughing. The three other kids - the other heirs - joined in.\_

\_Hiccup looked terrified, with tears welling up in his eyes, but he stomped over to the tree and started to climb. He did it with ease, actually.\_

\_His older self, still hidden among the trees, had a vague memory of climbing trees when he was younger. He was pretty good at it too, much to his father's distress, but one day he had stopped climbing trees... That was the day he was reliving, right now, wasn't it?\_

\_The young boy had finally reached his helmet and was trembling with relief as he clutched one horn in one hand and started to climb down. And then his foot slipped, and he fell.\_

\_Hiccup screamed and when he hit the ground face-first he started bawling. The heirs looked horrified; even Gringuts was finding it hard to still treat this as a joke. "Come on, he's fine!" the older boy insisted. "He's just being a baby."\_

\_A crowd of adults broke into the woods, the Chiefs with Stoick in the lead, but also a young Astrid holding her father's, Ferocious Flynn's, hand. Sometimes they would go on walks together, Hiccup suddenly remembered.\_

\_"Astrid an' her father heard yellin' - wat in Thor's name is goin' on here?!" Stoick shouted, but inhaled quickly when he saw his son on the ground. Hiccup looked minuscule compared to his father, who was cradling his bleeding son in his arms.\_

\_"We have to get him to Gothi, quickly!"\_

\_The scenes shifted to one a few years later. It was pouring rain and Hiccup looked around eight, and instantly he knew what memory this was. Hiccup was pounding on the door of a house, the only house for a mile, begging to be let in. "Please!"\_

\_"Sorry, no useless people around!" one of the boys said - probably Gringuts.\_

\_He had walked miserably around for almost an hour before finding another house. He had caught a horrible case of hypothermia. He remembered that gods-awful winter, waking up with horrible fevers. It was a miracle he had even survived, considering the fact he was still so tiny.\_

\_More memories flashed by, each one like the others... Something had gone wrong, the heirs had done something and pushed too far without realizing it...\_

\* \* \*

><p>When Hiccup woke up the next morning, although he knew he had had a bad dream, he couldn't remember any of it.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

Hiccup hammered away in the forge, beads of perspiration sliding down his neck. Finally, the metal was ready to be cooled. Spearheads had to be precise. If done wrong, any arrow fired wouldn't fly straight and it wouldn't do well in battle

Gobber looked over his work while he ducked the spearhead into water. "Good job lad," the old blacksmith said. Hiccup half-smiled. "Wat, no wisecrack fer me today? Wat's on yer mind Hic?"

"Gringuts said something that pushed my buttons yesterday, is all," Hiccup said. He brought the spearhead out and set it out to dry near the hearth.

"An' are yeh sure yeh don' wanna talk 'bout it?"

"Astrid already took care of that. I'm not upset - just angry. It was stupid of me to let him get under my skin."

Gobber cocked his head to the side. "Eh, I'm pretty sure Gringuts is tha stupid one," he replied. "After all, yer a hero now - people are worshipping' tha ground yeh walk on, yeh cheeky little bugger."

"I guess you're right."

"'Course I'm right."

Hiccup rolled his eyes but he was grinning now. "Okay, okay, you're right." Gobber gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"Damn straight. Now, let's get back ta tha spearheads shall we?"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

Ever since the confrontation with Gringuts the other day, Toothless never let Hiccup out of his sight. Gringuts wouldn't dare do anything as long as he was around. There was something off about that boy, the dragon could tell. Something wrong.

It was hard to worry about that when he and the other dragons were sprawled out in a grassy meadow with their riders lying peacefully beside them. Toothless had spread his wings out and Hiccup was using one as a bed. Although it wasn't extremely comfortable for him, he hated to disturb Hiccup, especially since his boy hadn't been having the best sleeps recently.

He lay his head back and let out a snort as the bristles of the sweet-smelling grass tickled his ear plates. Hiccup, with his eyes still closed, giggled. "Ticklish, eh bud?"

"Do me a favour and shut up," Snotlout mumbled, half-yawning.

Hiccup shared an amused grin with Toothless. "Cousins," he said simply, but then fell silent. Toothless watched him drift into sleep and smiled to himself. The relationship between cousins was an odd one alright.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>####<strong>

The next day, the dragon-rider pair were hanging out in the Cove after a trade negotiation meeting that the heirs had been forced to attend. As always, the meetings were dull and boring and Hiccup thought had seen Lenlos, the Angry Axeman heir, fall asleep at one point.

Frost was everywhere, the first sign of Berk's long winter rolling in, and there was a chill in the air, but leaning against Toothless, who radiated warmth, kept him from being cold. Some of the large pond in the Cove was frozen, with a thin coating of ice.

"Bud?" Hiccup said, smiling peacefully.

"Mmr?" Toothless asked, perking up slightly and looking at him curiously.

"You're my best friend, you know that right Toothless?" Toothless made a happy warbling sound and lifted Hiccup's arm over his head and neck. Hiccup laughed, swearing that the dragon was trying to tell him, \_You're my best friend too. \_"I know, bud." He scratched behind the Night Fury's ear plates; Toothless purred happily.

Hiccup didn't know how long they sat there, content in their comfortable silence, resting, or looking up at the clouds, just thinking. How lucky was he, to have such a good friend? One who had risked his life to save him, and changed everything and helped him stop a war. Who had helped him know what it was like to touch the skies.

But could never do so on his own again.

Hiccup frowned, his brow furrowing. "Toothless?" he began tentatively. The dragon looked up at him. Hiccup tried to gather his courage - this was Toothless, he could tell him anything, right? - when loud voices broke the silence.

"Are you sure we're going the right way?"

"Of course we are - that dragon isn't exactly hard to spot -"

Hiccup groaned - Gringuts and Norman, and by all the thrashing of the tree branches, Lenlos as well. He only had time to sit up properly before the three large boys were starting to descend the boulders at one of the Cove's entrances.

Toothless let out a low growl. "It's okay bud," Hiccup said, placing a hand on the Night Fury's head.

The trio of heirs were now striding towards him, Gringuts in front of him. Lenlos walked beside him, his hulking frame making him look like the other boy's bodyguard.

"Can I help you?" Hiccup said irritably. He went here whenever he didn't want to be disturbed - and now he was. Even Astrid rarely came here and knew better than to try to talk to him if he didn't want.

Most of the time, anyway.

"I just wanted to see where it all happened. This is where you befriended the Night Fury, isn't it?" Gringuts said, smirking. His dark eyes glanced up to the shield with the peeling paint and rotting wood, which was still stuck between a few boulders at one of the Cove's various entrances, but then flitted back to Hiccup.

"Yeah, but that can't be the whole reason you came here. It isn't exactly a short trip," Hiccup retorted. Although not too far into the forest, it was at least half an hour's walk away from where the village was; ten minutes or less, if you were flying.

Gringuts wasn't smirking at him anymore, however, and had moved on to study Toothless' tail, which had been swept up and was lying near Hiccup's feet. The prosthetic tail was almost brushing the boy's metal leg.

"That's the tail you built?" Gringuts asked.

"No - the one I did got ruined in the battle. Gobber, the blacksmith, he made that one, but modeled off my plans," Hiccup explained. Feeling self-conscious, he bent down to check that his leg was strapped properly in place. It was a habit he had picked up on whenever he was nervous, since after the battle he often needed to make sure it was, otherwise he slip and fall. Luckily, Toothless was always there to catch him, just in time.

"The Night Fury needs you to fly, correct?" Norman said. It was one of the first times he had done so. He had a raspy voice that cracked often; a side affect of puberty.

Hiccup looked up from his prosthetic to see Gringuts only a few steps away from him. "Yes, why are you asking?"

"You're a couple of cripples!" Norman crowed, grinning wildly. "Not a threat at all, cripples are!"

A lump formed in Hiccup's throat. \_Cripple. Synonymous with broken.\_

The Nutty Northmen didn't have many of them. Being far enough away, they hadn't been affected by the dragons. They had had spats with a few tribes since the \_J\_Ç«\_ru-f\_Ã|\_gir Askr \_had been formed, but whenever Hiccup had been forced to attend a Thing on Norman's island, rarely any amputees were there. There was no reason for them to be, whereas in Berk, they were practically overflowing.

Gobber had attended one of the Things. A Northmen villager walking with his son had seen the old blacksmith and said, "\_Cripple. Stay away from that broken man son." \_Hiccup had been angry, as had Gobber, but the older Viking had taken it in stride.

Hiccup had started at the forge the following year. There, he had learned he was good at fixing things - even if that thing was himself. At fifteen, Hiccup had been one of the youngest ones to become an amputee.

Toothless growled and stood up slowly as to allow the boy to get up himself. "Shut up Norman."

If anything, Norman's glee only increased. "Ooh, the cripple's speakin', ain't he Lenlos?!" Lenlos laughed loudly. "The heir to the Hairy Hooligans, a useless cripple!"

"I'm warning you," Hiccup said, taking a step forward. His long fingers curled into a small fist.

"Whattaya gonna do cripple?" Norman continued, still laughing uproariously. Hiccup's fist shook, but a lifetime of taunting - mostly from Snotlout - helped him keep himself under control.

He turned to Toothless, who was now looking quite threatening, back arched and ear plates slanted backwards. His growl was slowly growing louder and louder; the other boys were too busy laughing to notice.

"They're not worth it bud," Hiccup whispered to his dragon, glancing back at Norman and Lenlos, who were currently imitating a person walking with a limp. Hiccup rolled his eyes, but still felt tears prickle at the back of them. "Let's get outta here."

He easily got into the saddle and they were up in the air almost before Norman realized it. Even from high up, Hiccup could see disappointment cross the other's boy face; Gringuts just looked slightly pleased with himself.

Hiccup scowled. "Mmr?" Toothless warbled, sounding concerned. Hiccup gave the dragon a pat on the side of his head.

"Nah, it's alright Toothless... Somehow they just know how to get under my skin... Nothing a nice, long flight won't fix." They shot off into the clouds and soon, Hiccup was whooping with joy.

Maybe he - they, were cripples on land... but in the sky, they were invincible.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>####<strong>

Although the long flight had helped, hours later, when Hiccup was walking up to the forge, Toothless trotting beside him, the word cripple still echoed around his head. He could hear Gobber walking around the forge, and the man stuck his head out of one of the windows. "Yer late! Ge' in here, I need yeh help wi' some'hing."

Hiccup quickly joined the blacksmith near one of the wooden counters. Small pieces of metal - wheel axles - were lying on the counter. "Yer tiny hands makes it easier for yeh ta fix it - some of 'em have gone crooked."

The teenager looked at the pieces and went to get a pair of tweezers, and then Gobber turned back to his task at hand: straightening out an old sword for Ferocious Flynn Hofferson. When he didn't hear Hiccup walk back to wheel parts however, he turned around. The boy was just standing there, his back to him, sniffing.

"Hic?" Gobber said apprehensively. "Hic'up?" The Viking still didn't

turn around, so he walked up to him and got a good look at his face; the boy was crying. Hiccup reached up to wipe his eyes with his sleeve.

Hiccup slumped into a nearby chair, reaching down to his prosthetic. "It - it's really not coming back." His shoulders shook.

Gobber smiled at him sadly; as someone who had lost two limbs, he had been expecting this. Hiccup had bounced back almost immediately from the loss, and he had been waiting for when the boy mourned properly. "Fraid not." He rested his huge hand on his apprentice's shoulder. "Just let it out Hic."

And so he did. The crying shifted into sobbing, mourning for the fact he would never, ever, be the same again. Mourning, because every time he got out of bed, or off Toothless, or walked or tried to run, there was a constant creak, a reminder.

Toothless, sensing his rider's distress, had managed to come into the forge, and had wrapped himself around Hiccup's chair, eyes attentive and concerned. Minutes ticked by, the silence between them not awkward nor comfortable, but a type of understanding that didn't need to be stated. Once Hiccup had finally gone back to sniffing, he wiped his eyes with his sleeve.

"Feel bet'er?" Gobber asked gently. He lightly squeezed the boy's shoulder. Hiccup half-smiled up at him.

"Sort of," he admitted. He wanted to say thank you, but no words seemed to be able to express his gratitude, and there was a lump in his throat. "Thanks," he choked out finally.

Gobber gave him a small smile. "Anytime Hic." He cleared his throat. "So, are yeh ready ta go back ta work or do ya wanna take some more time or -"

"No, no I'm alright. Those wheel pieces aren't going to fix themselves." He got up, his legs slightly unsteady. Toothless got up, raising his head slightly. Hiccup gratefully wrapped an arm around his dragon's thick neck for support - both emotionally and physically. Hiccup limped over to the pieces and gave Gobber, who had already started back on the sword, a smile.

If this was what being broken meant, then he could live with it.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: This is not, under any circumstances, going to become a Hiccup/OC fic, don't worry.\*\*

\*\*I've always thought that although Hiccup is resilient and bounced back quickly from his loss, it would take a few months for it to fully settle in and then the dam would break and he would mourn properly. Not to mention Gobber/Hiccup friendship FTW.\*\*

\*\*Thank you for all your reviews/favourites/follows, I appreciate it very much.\*\*

\*\*Also, in regards to the fact that Terrible Terrors being faster flyers than Nadders, I'm going off the official HTTYD site's dragon

stats. If you haven't checked that out yet, you should. It's really cool and they even have a profile for Valka and some new pictures!  
:D\*\*

\*\*\_J\_\*\*\*\*\_Ç«\_\*\*\*\*\_ru-fÃ|gir Askir \_\*\*\*\* = loosely translated from Old Norse, means Warriors of Ash.\*\*

\*\*See you guys in two weeks! Or maybe less, if this early update trend continues. :3\*\*

#### 4. Cold Nights

VÇ«rÃ°r Inn VerÇ«ld SvÃ-Ã°a

\_Some men just want to \*\*watch the world burn\*\*\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>ACT I: embers<em>

\_3: Cold Nights\_

\* \* \*

><p>Berk was always cold, even in summer, and as a native Hiccup was used to it. But even by Berk's standards, today's wind was chilly and if it was any indication, tonight was going to be even colder.<p>

It seemed like he and Toothless' night flights had been put to an end and it greatly dampened his mood as they soared through the air on their morning flight. Well, it dampened his mood as much as it could â€" it had been months, but flying was still just as exhilarating as the first time they had woven their way through the sea stacks and came out alive.

He gently rubbed his arms and then breathed on his hands, hoping to warm them up. "I don't know about you bud," Hiccup said, patting his dragon's neck, "but some nice warm food at the Meade Hall sounds pretty good to me."

They sank through the clouds and descended lightly but were still high enough that the few people congregating to the Meade Hall looked like ants.

A chill ran through him, and the boy realized it would be smarter to go home and pull on a cloak so he wouldn't be as cold. His house was closer to them right now than the Meade Hall was anyway.

Not for the first time, Hiccup wondered if dragons could read minds, as Toothless had started to head towards the Haddock house without even a peep from him.

He got off the saddle with ease, unlocking himself from the saddle hooks and halfway to the door of his home when it opened, revealing Stoick standing in the doorway. His father didn't look happy.

Stoick didn't leave his son guessing what he was unhappy about for long though. "Snotlout punched Gringuts in the face this morning."

Whatever Hiccup had been expecting, that was not it. "What? Why?" Maybe Gringuts had tried to sit on Hookfang; to ride another's dragon without the rider's permission had become a huge insult, to the rider and the dragon. (It was the reason behind half of the twins' fights.)

"Gringuts was laughin' 'bout some'hing tha' happened yes'erday. Apparently, they were makin' fun of ya fer bein'... they were jokin' 'bout yer leg." Stoick's expression shifted into one of discomfort. Hiccup knew that his father still blamed himself for his loss, even if the Chief shouldn't.

Hiccup struggled to meet his dad's eyes. "Uh, yeah. They were. But I didn't do anything wrong, I wasn't even planning on telling Snotlout," he explained.

"None tha less, I know tha' ya were in tha right, but try ta stay civil 'round Gringuts. I know things have always been a little tense but... stay outta trouble? Just for until tha tribes have headed home."

Hiccup half-smiled. "I'll do my best."

Stoick looked relieved. "Alright." He swung his hands at his side, clearly not quite sure what to do next, but then reached up and put a hand on Hiccup's shoulder and squeezed it quickly, then dropping it to the side. "I have some chieffin' to do son, I'll see you at dinner."

Stoick hurriedly went on his way; Hiccup watched him go, smiling. Their relationship wasn't perfect, but it was a lot better than it used to be.

Toothless bumped Hiccup's hand, so the boy turned to his dragon. "What do you think about finding Snotlout at lunch, Toothless?"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

Snotlout's students were on their way to the Meade Hall for lunch when Hiccup landed outside of the Academy. His brown cloak that rested on his shoulders flapped in the wind as he entered the Ring.

"Hey Snotlout," he greeted. His cousin looked up from Hookfang, giving the Monstrous Nightmare one last pat on the snout.

"Look, I wasn't that late today â€" Snotlout began.

Hiccup resisted the urge to roll his eyes. More than once, Snotlout had been terribly late and needed to be reprimanded, and as the Chief's son and unofficial head of the Academy, that task had fallen into Hiccup's hands. "That's not why I'm here."

"Oh." Snotlout looked slightly taken aback. "Then why are you here?"

Hiccup took a moment to answer. "I heard you punched Gringuts," he

said quietly, refusing to look at his cousin.

Snotlout laughed uneasily. "Well," he said loudly, hitting his chest with his fist in an effort of bravado, "nobody insults the Hairy Hooligans!" His boast wavered near the end.

Hiccup looked up and almost smiled. "Thanks."

Snotlout looked momentarily conflicted, but then he swallowed hard. "Y-you're welcome," he choked up. He shifted awkwardly from foot to foot. "So, er..." He cleared his throat. "Do you wanna head to the, uh, Meade Hall together or are we just gonna stand here all day?"

Hiccup smiled a little. "Lead the way."

To say their relationship was difficult was an understatement. Hiccup had the position; Snotlout had everything a Viking should have. It hadn't helped that Spitelout, Snotlout's father, was highly competitive. And then everything changed. They went from the mocker and the mocked to allies in a matter of hours.

But no matter what, Hiccup knew he cared for his cousin, and deep down, Snotlout did too. Not that either of them would ever admit it, of course. But it was there all the same. And really, that was what mattered.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>####<strong>

At lunch, Hiccup slid into the seat next to Fishlegs, who didn't have any food or plates lying in front of him, but instead a large book with a leather bound cover. Most of the book was blank pages, but a small piece was already filled with writing and drawings.

Fishlegs was writing furiously, his charcoal chipped down to a small nub. Hiccup peered over the larger boy's shoulder. "Adding something to the Tidal Class?" he asked.

"Just a few last minute footnotes; some Scauldrons were seen near Crab Cove; it might be a migration point," Fishlegs answered. "Do you have time to help me organize all the Zippleback riders' interviews?"

"I have some work to do at the forge first, but does mid-afternoon work for you?" Hiccup said.

Fishlegs smiled. "That'd be great, thanks."

Hiccup waved a hand dismissively before digging into his food. "Anytime." They continued their meal in a comfortable silence and Hiccup found himself feeling grateful that he could now call someone like Fishlegs his friend.

After a couple of hours at the forge, Hiccup flew over to the Meade Hall to find Fishlegs sitting at a table covered with papers, his back arched, his face hovering just over the one he was currently reading.

The Gronckle rider didn't even look up when Hiccup took the seat beside him. "I've left a pile for you," the large boy said, sparing a glance finally to look at him.

Hiccup turned to the stack of paper in front of him. It wasn't huge, but it was still thicker than at least three of his notebooks combined. This was going to take a while. He reached up and took a few off from the top. "Alright." He looked down at the first piece of parchment. "Let's get started."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>####<strong>

\_Spark and Flint always argue over who I'm riding. A saddle so I'm located more towards the base of their necks should fix that, or even perhaps one on their backs and I'll see through the opening between their necks...\_

Hiccup looked blearily up from the paper. The candle they had put up an hour ago flickered as he took the piece he had finished reading and put it in the 'Keep' pile the boys had wordlessly set up. Fishlegs let out a yawn and put his own piece in the 'Throw Away' pile, which was significantly larger than the other.

Hiccup rubbed at his eyes. "We did it," he croaked. Fishlegs only murmured in agreement. Hiccup groaned as he pushed himself up onto his feet; his right leg had fallen asleep. He nudged it against the side of the table, hoping to provoke some feeling from it, but to no avail.

"I don't know about you 'Legs, but I'm heading home." He moved out of the narrow space in between the table and the bench. "Bud?" he called.

It only took a few moments for Toothless to arrive at his side. The Night Fury had been taking a nap, or eating their leftover meals from \_nÃ;ttverÃ°r. \_Toothless let out an excited warble "â€" was it time to fly?

Hiccup frowned a little, placing one hand on the dragon's head and scratching. "It's too cold at night now bud. Maybe some extra fish instead."

Although obviously disappointed, Toothless accepted the reality. Despite how much he wanted to fly, he knew that humans couldn't take the cold like dragons could. It made them sick and that was bad. Hiccup was \_not\_ going to get sick because of him.

"Night Fishlegs," Hiccup said, turning around and beginning to walk away from the table.

"Good night Hiccup," Fishlegs replied, sounding as tired as he felt. "And thanks."

Hiccup turned back slightly and almost smiled. "You're welcome."

The journey back to the Haddock house felt long. The blistering wind, which was thankfully blowing on his back, but still freezing, didn't help. He kept one hand on Toothless, waves of heat coming off of the

reptile.

Even though it was cold and winter was rolling in within a week, this night would have been a perfect one for flying. The night sky was cloudless and the moon was almost full. Hiccup stopped walking and sighed; there was no chance of taking the risk of getting sick. Even if Toothless let him, that hypothermia he had gotten when he was a kid had scared him straight.

With a dejected, "C'mon bud," they resumed their walk back home. They were only a few steps from the porch when he heard loud, deep voices.

"â€" Honestly Stoick, m'son was just doin' a little teasin', nuttin' harmful 'bout it â€" Chief Knuck was saying.

Hiccup normally wasn't one to eavesdrop but he was frozen to the spot. They were discussing what happened yesterday. They were discussing him... How could he not listen?

"It was much more than teasin' Knuck!" Stoick said, sounding hurt and angry. "There's nuttin' funny 'bout my son bein' one of tha youngest amputees in Berk's history!"

"Yer boy just needs to toughen up â€" "

"Hic'up isn't like tha' Knuck! It's amazin' he made it past his firs' year â€" tha' was one of tha coldest winters ya know â€" an' time an' time again, yer son pushed too far an' almost killed him!"

"Gringuts has an interestin' sense of humour tha's all â€" he didn't mean fer it ta go too far!"

"But each time it did!" Stoick roared. "There's some'hing not right wit' tha' boy of yers."

"At least mine can hold his own against anyone â€" it's a miracle that Hic'up's alive today, Thor knows why!"

It felt like an icicle had pierced his heart, even if he knew it was true. By the time he was twelve, he had experience more near-death experiences than most Vikings had in their entire life.

"Ya shut yer mouth â€" my son is a hero, he defeated a dragon tha size of a mountain an' stopped tha war!"

Both Chiefs were breathing heavily, seemingly trying to compose themselves.

"Maybe so," Knuck said begrudgingly, "but ya know tha' yer boy is dif'eren't, not tha Viking â€" how can ya expect otha chiefs ta take him seriously?!"

Stoick was silent. Then, "Knuck, I know my boy isn't tha most ordinary Viking, but he's tha best I've ever seen."

Hiccup felt himself swell with pride. A warm feeling spread up from his chest and to his fingers.

"Stoick," Knuck began gently, "ya know what Hic'up means, dontcha?"

What otha people will see it as? Stoick... Hic'up means accident, after all."

It seemed as if every other noise â€" the sea lapping against Berk's rocky shores, the creaks and groans of his house, the chirp of crickets and wails of dragons â€" had faded from the world, leaving only the sound of Hiccup's heart thundering against his ribcage.

\_Accident?\_

A lump formed in his throat and his eyes stung.

In the early day of the Berkian Vikings, names had specific meanings. Each child was named by the Naming Dame, who was the oldest woman in the village. He knew that certain names had certain meanings and used to be used as the person's title â€" Stoick meant vast, for example â€" but that practice had mostly died out after the fourth generation.

Hiccup knew the Naming Dame who had named him had died a few days afterwards. The villagers were superstitious and had taken it as a bad omen. It didn't help that the dragon known as the Night Fury had arrived two weeks later either. Stoick had shrugged it off. Gothi had become the new Naming Dame and that had seemed to be the end of that.

Hiccup got on the saddle. Berk's one and only library â€" a small room lit by candlelight just on the outskirts of the village (Vikings didn't have much use for words, after all) â€" would hold the answer.

He tried to swallow the lump in his throat. "To the library bud."

The night air chilled him to the core, but he found he barely registered it. They landed with ease outside of the small shack and Hiccup pushed the door open tentatively. It creaked and even though he didn't weigh nearly as much as his peers, the floorboards still groaned beneath him.

The small library was drafty and dark. After stubbing his toe (really, couldn't his \_metal foot \_have hit it instead?) on the leg of a small table, he groped in the dark for a candle. A few moments passed until he felt the cool metal of the holder and the dried wax.

He brought the candle close to him. "A little light Toothless?" he asked, lowering the candle so it was at the dragon's eye level. A tiny shot of the Night Fury's plasma blast hit the wick, illuminating the drafty room with light and casting eerie shadows on the walls.

As Hiccup surveyed the room, it seemed like nothing had changed since the last time he was here, when he was two or three and his mother's funeral had been concluded by entering her name in the Death Book. He had clutched his father's hand and cried the whole time.

He held the candle up to one of shelves, scanning the spines. All were leather bound, thick, with hastily scribbled Norse on the

spines. A thick coating of dust covered all of them, except for the black book near the end – the Death Book. There was only a thin layer and Hiccup gladly went past it onto another shelf.

Finally, he had reached the 'N' section. The Name Book was the first, and he pulled it down, setting the candle on the windowsill. He blew the dust off and opened it up.

The pages were yellow with age and some of the edges were slightly burned – surely from previous dragon attacks. Judging by the date scrawled in the corner, it was even older than the Book of Dragons.

He took a seat on the floor and hurriedly started to search for the 'H' section. Once he found it, he had to try to find his name among the others. It was at the very bottom of the 'Hi' part, he very nearly missed it.

There, clearly printed, as blunt as an axe, were the words:

\_HICCUP = Accident. This name is given to the runt of a generation.\_

His heart sank. What Knuck said had been right. Toothless crooned softly beside him, nudging his head with the dragon's large scaly one gently.

"I'm alright bud," Hiccup said thickly. "It's just..." Toothless' exhaled sharply through his nose, causing Hiccup's hair to ruffle. He nudged his boy again. Hiccup sighed. "I know Toothless, I shouldn't let it get to me... It was just what the Naming Dame named me, not what everyone thinks of me..."

Yet the lump in his throat didn't disappear.

Still feeling deflated, Hiccup stood up and put the Name Book back in its place, when he noticed something he hadn't before. Standing beside the book was another one titled Naming Dragons.

Like the Death Book, it only had a thin layer of dust on it, due to the Record Keeper of Berk being forced to pencil down the name of the dragon he and Toothless had defeated five months prior. After much debate (which had included more fists than words) between the names of the Green Death and the Red Death, the villagers had finally decided on the latter.

Always curious, Hiccup pulled the book down and sat back down on the floor. There were splotches of ink all over the contents page, but with a question burning in the back of his mind, Hiccup flipped to the page titled Subsections.

There weren't many names written below. There was '\_DOWNED DRAGON\_' with the same advice Gobber had given them written underneath.

The very last subsection name – which surprised Hiccup greatly – was Toothless.

Almost afraid of what he would find, he read the words printed beside.

\_TOOTHLESS = Mistake. This name is given to a dragon whom has lost their claws or most often broken teeth, or suffered a great injury, rendering the dragon defenseless. This is often a mistake that costs the dragon their life.\_

Something like recognition seemed to flash in Toothless' eyes when he looked up to meet them, and although he knew the Night Fury was smart, he knew the dragon couldn't know what was written on the page. Nonetheless, it made him feel at least a little better.

Closing the book, he put it back in its spot and blew out the candle before leaving the shack. He didn't want to be in there anymore " he needed fresh air. Maybe then it would be easier to breathe.

He mounted Toothless' saddle, his prosthetic clicking into the stirrup. "Let's go Toothless," he murmured.

They blended into the sky as only a Night Fury could and he didn't even have to say the word as Toothless glided over the forest, already knowing the destination.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>####<strong>

As the night had worn on, it had only gotten colder, but Hiccup was still surprised at the deep-settled chill in his bones and how much he was shivering by the time he and his dragon reached the Cove.

For a moment, he had considered going home. But the emotions twisted up inside of him, most of which were hurt and sadness, were too tangled to unravel before he got to his house. Hiccup had decided he wasn't ready to face his father. Stoick would ask what was wrong and then he would have to come clean about eavesdropping and it would just be another shouldering of guilt for the Chief... And seeing Chief Knuck would be hard too.

Hiccup sighed and plopped himself down on one of the many boulders littered around the Cove. Another shiver ran through him, but he made no attempts to get warm.

Toothless warbled worriedly behind him, but he didn't turn around, which he felt sorry for, but he really just felt like being alone.

Toothless rumbled in annoyance. He could hear the dragon pad his way over by the sound of his scales and wings grazing the frost-covered grass. Toothless exhaled sharply on him, like before in the library shack.

"Go away Toothless," Hiccup told him miserably. Toothless snorted indignantly; as if. Instead of listening, he draped a wing over his rider's shoulders, sharing his warmth. Although obviously still content to wallow in self-pity, Hiccup didn't try to shove his wing off, so Toothless took the opportunity to wrap another wing around him.

Even if the action had first irritated him further, Hiccup found he couldn't complain. He was not just as warm, if not more so, than he would have been sitting in front of a roaring fire in his house. His

shivering had subsided within a matter of minutes.

"Thank you," he told his dragon, albeit reluctantly. Toothless hummed happily and it was infectious. Soon, his annoyance and hurt had ebbed away.

Sometimes he wondered how Toothless could communicate with him so efficiently without words. He would love to be able to speak to his best friend " all the questions he could ask!

But such a thing was unheard of. Even in the old legends, there was never any dragon-human communication. Yet he knew that dragons did have their own language " the grunts and rumbles and body language meant something more, weren't just random. If only he could decipher them.

In all fairness, he could understand Toothless fairly well. He knew which warble or croon or tail flick meant what, for the most part. And for the time, as he gave Toothless a small hug of thanks, it was enough.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>####<strong>

They spent the night in the Cove. After the young Viking had given into his tiredness, he had been kept warm by being curled up into Toothless' belly, just like how his father had found him after the battle with the Red Death, held protectively by the Night Fury.

Speaking of his father, as the duo flew to the Meade Hall for breakfast, he found dread build up in his stomach at the thought of Stoick's reaction. The Chief would be furious, and that was putting it lightly.

When he did see Stoick, Hiccup walked up to him slowly, Toothless nudging his backside to prod him along. "Look, dad, I'm sorry I didn't come home last night " "

Stoick put a hand on his shoulder. "Ya overhead me an' Knuck's conversa'ion, didn't ya?" His son didn't meet his eyes and the boy's silence was enough of an answer. "I'm sorry ya had ta hear tha' Hic'up " ya know tha' none of us see ya like tha' right " mos' don't even know their name meanin's."

Hiccup half-smiled. "Thanks dad."

Stoick removed his hand and swung his arms at his side. The older Viking cleared his throat. It was back to business as usual. "Ya are, however, in trouble. No midday flights for tha rest of tha week " do some more classes wit' tha kids."

Hiccup took his punishment in stride and knew that if it wasn't for the fact that Toothless needed him to fly, the ban would have been for much longer and for the whole day. Stoick knew that was unfair though and kept that in mind whenever " although not extremely often " he needed to hand out punishments. Doing some more classes wasn't the worst thing in the world and it would keep him away from Gringuts, which was always a welcome bonus.

"Now get along ta ya friends â€" Astrid's been particularly worried." Stoick smiled with a knowing look in his eye and Hiccup flushed, turning as red as a flaming Monstrous Nightmare.

Stoick watched him go to the table with the other teens fondly, allowing himself a chuckle as Astrid socked his son on the arm â€" "That's for scaring me," â€" and proceeded to give him a quick hug â€" "That's for everything else."

Now that it was clear Hiccup was safe and sound â€" really, he should have known that Toothless would always bring Hiccup back, at least in almost one piece â€" Stoick wanted to go up the Shrine.

Unfortunately chief duties were going to get in the way â€" the Lorne's were expecting a baby any day and he needed to prepare the induction ceremony with Gothi; there had been some fishing squabbles down at Pebble Beach â€" he would have to wait until evening.

Despite how tired he felt, he knew he would still make the journey, even if the Shrine was as high up as Gothi's house on the opposite side of the island.

He had a lot to say.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

Hiccup went about his daily tasks to the best of his ability. He helped Fishlegs give feedback from the letters to Ruff and Tuff and added the important information into the Dragon Manual, but he knew his heart wasn't in it. If Fishlegs picked up on anything odd, he didn't ask.

Like his dad had told him to, he told his students extra classes would be happening. The kids' cheers - "More flying, yes!" - brightened his mood considerably. The students really were improving, especially Nonta, the young girl who rode a Gronckle. When he told her so, she was practically glowing with happiness.

The fact that Hiccup didn't see Gringuts at all for the rest of the day didn't hurt either.

After doing some small work at the forge for Gobber, he and Toothless went on a flight before heading to the Meade Hall for dinner.

He was ready to put the horrible night before behind him and it seemed like all of Berk was doing the most to help him to.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

The Shrine was not much more than a large slab of stone that rested upon a platform on the otherwise craggy base of the mountain. It was too large to be simply an altar, yet still too small to be considered a boulder. Gravestones of the past women on Berk collected around

it.

As always, Stoick dropped a collection of wild flowers on the stone and kept two and laid them on the grave of his wife, Valhallarama the Swift. He pressed two fingers to his lips and dropped them to the stone before turning towards the larger slab.

Carved into the stone was a simple name in runes: \_Hluti.\_

Stoick, his legs aching from the effort it had taken him to get up there, sank to his knees, and began to pray. "O Goddess of Fate, thank you for keeping my son safe on this cold night and I pray for his safety for many years to come. Please keep him away from Gringuts, I don't want any harm to come to him and especially no more pain from my own foolishness."

The silence stretched on but once he had bowed once more respectfully, he went to his wife's grave and told her everything. About the tribes, Hiccup's leg, his hopes and fears. Even in death, she was his confidant, and his support.

"I love you Val," he said, his voice cracking. He gripped the stone tightly and then stood up. He had to get back to the Meade Hall for dinner and to check up on his son.

He sent one last prayer to the goddess of fate and left the Shrine.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

The Viking and his dragon were walking home from the Meade Hall after dinner. Clouds drifted across the moon and the stars twinkled. The blustering wind was at their backs, but Hiccup still shivered slightly.

Perhaps it was this distraction that made his metal leg slide on a patch of ice. He barely had time to register it before Toothless had swooped in to catch him. He supposed the sensation should have been familiar, since it happened almost every day. But a lifetime of falling with no one moving to catch him kept him from taking any catch for granted.

He looked down at his dragon and gave the Night Fury a pat on the snout. "Thanks bud." Toothless warbled happily.

Something twitched behind Toothless and it caught the boy's eye; the tail. Guilt rose up and a wave of shame washed over him.

"You know about your tail bud?" he said nervously. Toothless' ear plates perked up. "Well I..." His heart leaped up into his throat. "I â€"

There was a yell behind him. "Get inside Hic'up, ya'll catch a cold in this weather!" Stoick hollered.

"Okay dad!" he called back, feeling relieved. It was easier to breathe now. "We better go bud."

Hiccup shuddered a little, but Toothless nudged his hand with his nose. Instantly, the warmth seeped into his ice cold fingers and he scratched under the dragon's chin to show his thanks.

Toothless trotted after him into the house. Hiccup got into bed gratefully, wanting to postpone the conversation that would surely come, one day. Not tonight, nor tomorrow, but soon.

He took off Toothless' saddle gear " the leather could rub against his scales uncomfortably in the night " and hung them up on a hook. Then he took off his own appendage and left it beside his bed, when he realized something that hit him quite jarringly.

They matched. In Berk, matching battle scars were a sign of brotherhood.

He supposed in all the craziness of the past few months, he hadn't really taken time to think about it, but he and Toothless matched. He guessed that the gods really did keep score up there and he let out a chuckle.

Hiccup didn't know how much he believed in fate, but the more the longer he had been friends with Toothless, the more he thought he did.

It seemed like at every corner, Toothless seemed to fit into him like a puzzle piece.

The mistake and the accident. Looks like they had proven everyone wrong. And as Hiccup drifted off to sleep, his heartbeat slowing in time with his dragon's breathing, he was ready to keep proving that.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

A woman in long white robes walked up the Haddock house, her long dark hair flowing behind her in the wind. Her skin was as white as bone with high, strong cheek bones and she had blue eyes, yet no pupil. The blue of her eyes shifted between colours of deep, ocean blue and navy.

In each hand, a string was stretched out, wrapped around her long fingers. One was black and one was green. Near the beginning of both strings, in the space between her hands, they were tied into a knot, at not even a quarter of their length.

Slowly, she wound them around each other twice, forming a small braid of seven, but she just as slowly unraveled her.

She looked up at the house with her pupil-less eyes, which had shifted back to navy. The woman looked back down at the two strings in her hands. She did not move her mouth, yet still spoke, her eyes flickering back up the house, a darker blue than ever.

\_"I'm sorry," \_the goddess said.

Hluti was gone before the moon reached the highest point in the sky.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Hello everyone.\*\*

\*\*The idea of 'Hiccup' meaning accident is from the book series, which I have not read (I do want to though). The meaning behind Toothless' name is original, however. Secondly, \*\*\*\*is story also disregards HTTYD2 to some extent, which is why I am using the name of Hiccup's mother in the book series. The gods - Hluti, especially - will play a further part in this story.\*\*

\*\*Spitelout is confirmed as Snotlout's father in the TV series.\*\*

\_\*\*Hluti\*\*\_\*\* = fate in Old Norse.\*\*

\*\*The real plot-propelling stuff is in the next chapter; make of that what you will. Unfortunately, due to real life business, the next chapter should be up within two weeks, or it could be a little late. Just a warning of precaution. \*\*

\*\*P.S.: Hopefully, this will be my shortest chapter, excluding the Prologue.\*\*

## 5. Guilt

\_ACT I: embers\_

\_4: Guilt\_

\* \* \*

><p>For the first few years of his life, Hiccup had been sure that there was no one more annoying than his cousin, who had poked and pinched him all through their toddler years. And then he had met Gringuts.<p>

True to his word, he had been doing his best to stay out of trouble and that meant doing his best to avoid the Mangy Muttonhead heir. Although normally even-tempered and slow to anger, something about Gringuts managed to get under Hiccup's skin and that in itself was frustrating enough.

Stoick had said no more midday flights, so to help make up for it, Hiccup elongated his morning ones for the next three days, partially for enjoyment and partially for Toothless, but mostly for the hope that Gringuts would be gone by the time they finally landed for breakfast.

Both times Gringuts was gone, arriving just in the last half hour of breakfast. In fact, Hiccup very nearly missed the meal altogether the second day. While he rushed inside to catch some of the still mildly warm porridge, Toothless feasted with the other dragons from the fish troughs and multiple barrels stationed outside of the Hall.

For the rest of the morning, the dragon-rider pair were preoccupied with flying lessons. Due to the progress of the students, Hiccup was now allowing them to go higher. Not nearly high enough that if they

fell they would die, obviously, but high enough that if they did fall, a bone or two might be broken.

He and Toothless circled underneath the group of children, ready to catch any of them should they fall. A few of the young Vikings teetered dangerously, but their young dragons were already experts at readjusting themselves for their riders.

The class finished up quickly after their stomachs started to rumble, so most of the kids headed off to lunch early.

Hiccup wished he could get up to the skies. Only two more days and their ban would be over, thank Thor. He suspected that he loved flying just as much as Toothless, if only beaten by a short amount. He let out a sigh and felt himself deflate. No use crying over spilled beer, he supposed.

The young Viking wasn't exactly sure what he should do. Flying, obviously, was completely out of the question. The privacy of the Cove now felt violated and he was sure he would only feel ready to go back once all the tribes were gone. And he didn't have any projects going at the Forge he wanted to work on. It seemed the only other option was lunch - Hiccup's stomach growled - which actually didn't sound that bad right now.

He scratched Toothless under the chin and pet the dragon's soft snout. "C'mon bud," he said, trying to inject some cheerfulness into his voice, "let's go eat." Toothless warbled in agreement and they set off together down the path.

Despite the fact it had rained the night before, the sun was shining and even the wind wasn't that cold: the last good day before winter. The dampness of the soil and grass was pleasant and even more pleasant was the scent wafting out of the Hall's doors, which had been flung open. It was a mixture of warm vegetables, stewed meat and honey - ooh, that soup was always so good.

Traders had set up their stalls closer to the Hall and Hiccup was tempted into looking at quite a few, even with the soup waiting for him. Whenever Toothless felt his boy had been at one too long, he would nudge his rider from behind and they would keep walking.

\_Hey, a dragon has too each too, \_Toothless' pointed looks seemed to be saying.

"Okay, okay, Toothless," the Night Fury nudged him forwards again when his boy didn't move, "hey, see â€" going, I'm going." Toothless snorted and rolled his eyes, but fell into stride with his friend.

A few children were sitting on the steps that led up to the Meade Hall, talking excitedly. Perhaps about something interesting one had bought from a trader. The steps were slick and wet from the rain, so it wasn't surprising to Toothless when Hiccup slipped, too caught up in what he had seen and had been thinking instead of concentrating on walking.

He lunged forwards and felt Hiccup's hands and torso on his head. Slowly, the boy used his hands to push himself off. Toothless used the close proximity between them to lick Hiccup's face in revenge. His rider recoiled instantly, half of his face covered in slobber.

"Ew - \_Toothless!\_" He used his sleeve to start wiping it off.

Toothless laughed at him - a deep, resonating rumble - completely unapologetic. \_Pay closer attention to where you're going, next time.\_ In retaliation, Hiccup flicked some spit off his fingers and it hit Toothless right above his left eye. Disgruntled, Toothless shook his head and tried to scrub it off with a paw. By the time he was done, Hiccup had already reached the entrance way to the Hall.

Hiccup waited patiently for his dragon to catch up and they walked into the Hall together. The Hall was even more crowded than usual. The Big Brutes villagers took up two and a half tables by themselves, with some Angry Axemen crammed onto the benches as well. Hiccup quickly located his friends on the other side and slid into his seat in between Astrid and Fishlegs.

"â€" the first storm of winter is definitely on its way," Fishlegs was saying. Astrid nodded in agreement tore some meat off her chicken leg and then threw the rest of it to Stormfly, who was sitting nearby. The leg disappeared down the Deadly Nadder's gullet. The dragon then hacked the bone up again; a group of Goths' Terrible Terrors swarmed it, quickly getting into a game of tug-of-war for it.

"And when it does, I'm gonna make Mother Nature regret it," Snotlout said. "With my face!" he added.

"Yeah, that's a thing called frostbite," Ruffnut replied. Her brother cackled while Snotlout pouted.

"Whatever," he said decidedly. "But since this is the last good day before winter really hits, we should do something special. Maybe a date, Astrid?" He smiled and quirked an eyebrow at her.

Astrid mimed vomiting into her breakfast, which made Fishlegs laugh when he had gone to swallow. Hiccup had to thump him hard on the back until he coughed it out. "Thanks," Fishlegs squeaked. He took a gulp of water. "But I think Snotlout's right - \_not\_ about the date," he said hastily when Astrid had sent an accusing look his way, "but we should do something special. Maybe a picnic?"

"Or a huge obstacle course and race around the island?" Astrid suggested excitedly. Typical that she would want the competition, even if there wasn't much that a Night Fury could be beaten at.

"Why not both?" Hiccup said. "We have almost the whole day after all." The others figured it was good a plan as any but were content not to say anything and watch Ruffnut and Tuffnut argue and hit each other over the last chicken drumstick for the rest of the meal.

Astrid led the organization party. She and the twins were going to get the food (\_someone\_ had to keep the Thorstons out of trouble), while Snotlout and Fishlegs were going to get things like blankets and extra cutlery. While they were fulfilling their jobs, Hiccup and Toothless would do a quick lap around the island, looking for the perfect spot to have the picnic at before doubling back to meet at the Meade Hall in half an hour.

When Hiccup arrived back outside the Hall's doors after finding a nice clearing nearby a large meadow of the sweet-smelling grass the dragons liked (Dragon nip, Fishlegs had coined it) he found the others waiting for him with their dragons. He jostled in his saddle as Toothless landed.

"Ready?" he asked, smiling.

Astrid made sure everything was secure in her large, woven basket of food and blankets before pulling herself onto Stormfly's saddle. "Ready," she answered. The five riders flew off as one as the other heirs exited the Hall after a long lunch.

Koza's eyes lingered on the black dragon, spiraling upwards in the sky. "Who'd ever thought he'd become a hero?" she mused.

"Still a scrawny crippled runt," Gringuts said, clenching his fists. There was a fading bruise over his eye, where Snotlout had punched him the other day. Koza looked at him with a bored expression, sweeping her dark hair out of her eyes.

"Looks like someone's jealous that all the attention's off him," she said flatly. "Hiccup's been the talk of the whole Barbaric Archipelago for the past five months and I don't think that's going to stop any time soon."

"I'd give them something else to talk about if that stupid dragon wasn't with him all the time," he said sourly, upset that Koza had hit so close to home. Lenlos made a soft noise of agreement, cracking his knuckles, while Norman laughed with glee.

That fishbone? A \_hero? \_So he defeated a big dragon, so what? He only did it with another dragon's help... Besides, Gringuts knew he had more noteworthy accomplishments under his belt. But no, because of stupid Hiccup, nobody remembered about all the gory victories he had on the battlefield. Hero his ass.

"It's ridiculous - that thing never leaves his side. Suppose it can't really, 'cause Hiccup controls its tail," Norman said, carrying on ignorantly, cackling again.

None of the heirs said anything as Gringuts zoned out away from the conversation, deep in thought. Norman was a complete idiot, most of the time - really, what did that Thorston girl possibly have to offer that was worth the punches she gave? - but what had been said left him thinking hard.

\_That thing never leaves his side. Suppose it can't really\_...

Had Hiccup ever said what had left the Night Fury crippled? He smiled to himself. Oh, this was going to work out perfectly.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

After their mid-afternoon picnic and long races, the five teenagers were content to lie on the blankets Fishlegs and Snotlout had brought; the dragons had flown off, keen to explore the Dragon Nip fields, but still within earshot if their riders needed them.

Toothless had to stay behind; the largest fields were located over a cliff that dropped straight to the ocean, wide and far too long to walk along.

Hiccup had given Toothless the unspoken offer for him to ride the Night Fury there and let Stormfly fly him back over, but Toothless had refused. What if something happened, and he couldn't get back to Hiccup fast enough? Humans were terribly fragile, the smallest things getting that nasty red all over them... As much as the dragons cared for Hiccup, they still ultimately cared for their own riders more. His boy's safety wouldn't be second nature. He didn't want to risk it; he had already almost lost his boy once and he didn't want to go through that ever again.

Besides, there was plenty of grass over here, even if it would have been nice to be around the other dragons, he was content to stay.

That didn't quell the waves of guilt that washed over the Viking boy. He looked at Toothless - curled up and dozing peacefully - for a long time before looking back up the sky, letting out a sigh.

"What're you sighing for, it's a beautiful day!" Snotlout exclaimed. "Last good day before winter and I won't have you ruining it for me."

Hiccup rolled his eyes while Astrid glowered at the Jorgenson. "Are you really that blind?" she snapped. Snotlout turned towards her, surprised by how quickly that had angered her. Little things rarely did.

But then he followed Hiccup's gaze, which had gone back to the Night Fury's tail. "Oh," he said, feeling slightly stupid. The tail; right.

Astrid turned towards the lanky teen. "Hiccup," she began gently, "Look, you shouldn't feel guilty about it -"

"Shouldn't?" he whispered. Even the twins had stopped their petty squabbling ("That cloud does not look like a brain -" "How do you know if you don't have one -") to watch and wait. "Shouldn't? I did that to him Astrid... He can't come and go like the other dragons can... He's crippled for life. At least I can survive on my own, but... there's a reason a downed dragon is normally a dead dragon."

Hiccup put his head in his hands and took a deep breathe. Then he stood up, walked up to Toothless and looked down at his dragon, wanting to reach down and pet his dragon - moved his hand to do so - but stopped at the last second. He tucked his hand closer to his body instead. Blinking rapidly, he walked away and into the woods without another word.

Astrid frowned, a lump welling up in her throat. Couldn't he see that Toothless didn't want to leave in the first place? But had the Night Fury even put the pieces together - they were smart, but how smart were they really? Had Toothless made the connection, or was he still ignorant of it?

She sighed and walked over to Toothless, trailing her hand along his

head. "Mmr?" the dragon crooned, blinking sleepily.

"I think Hiccup needs you right now," she told him quietly.

Toothless glanced at the forest in the direction Hiccup had gone, green eyes now alert and awake. Shaking his head - as if at his rider's foolishness - Toothless got up and padded over to the woods.

Really, did Hiccup honestly think he wasn't going to follow him?

\* \* \*

><p><strong>####<strong>

Hiccup crashed through the brambles of the forest, carefully making his way over large, gnarled tree roots and fallen logs. Moss and clusters of mushrooms were everywhere. The sunlight that was filtering through the leaves gave everything a slight, yellow glow.

He was so angry he didn't care how much noise he was making, even though he knew there were predators â€" real, live predators like wolves â€" that lived in this part of the island.

His eyes stung and his stump throbbed, but he just needed to get away. He needed to get away from the others, the others who just didn't understand any part of the situation he was in. He needed to get away from Toothless, his wonderful best friend â€" and it was his fault, it was all his fault...

He could hear the Night Fury running after him. "Go away Toothless," he said, his voice breaking.

The Viking tripped over a tree root and fell to his knees. Before he even had time to pick himself up, Toothless was right in front of him, sniffing and looking at him with worried eyes.

"Go away," he said again, but he knew that if Toothless did leave, it would take him ten times longer to pull himself together right now. Toothless gently bumped his head with his own. Hiccup got onto his knees and wrapped his arms around Toothless' thick neck. His shoulders shook; Toothless rumbled reassuringly.

What was wrong with his boy? Why was he so sad? He leaned into the side of Hiccup's head, trying to convey comfort. Gods, he wished he could speak with Hiccup like humans could.

Hiccup, after a while, eventually pulled away, sniffing. His eyes were red, but he managed a smile. "Thanks bud, I just... I have something I need to tell you..."

"That you're a useless runt?"

Hiccup jumped, startled, and fell over onto his bum. Toothless let out a low, growl, glowering at Gringuts who was leisurely walking over to them, coming out of the dense foliage.

Hiccup hurriedly stood up and wiped his eyes. "What are you doing

here?" he said angrily. Gods, how much had Gringuts seen? Even Snotlout would have been preferable - his cousin didn't hate his guts.

"Just dropping in for a chat," Gringuts said casually. "Looks like that beastie of yours is loyal to a fault. Doesn't he know?"

Hiccup's stomach dropped; oh gods no. "Shut up," he hissed. This was bad, this was so very, very bad. He needed to do it at the right time, in private, with Toothless, from his mouth - not like this.

Gringuts held up his hands defensively. "Alright," he said, relenting, still with an airy tone. "I still can't believe you got the most powerful, best dragon of them all. Talk about complete opposites. I'm surprised he hasn't left you yet - oh wait, he can't."

Hiccup clenched his fist. Toothless stepped forward, baring his teeth. "What do you want Gringuts?" To Hiccup's surprise, his voice was fairly steady; angry, but steady.

"Nothing in particular, cripple." Hiccup only rolled his eyes; yes, crippled he was - useless he was not. "Until your dragon gives you some more breathing room, then I have some information you'll find very interesting."

Despite himself, Hiccup felt that tug at his curiosity and put a hand on Toothless' neck. "Give us some space bud," he said quietly. Very reluctantly, Toothless took a few steps away from the boy.

Only a few seconds passed before Gringuts walked right up to Hiccup and grabbed him by the shirt collar. Hiccup felt his prosthetic scrape the ground as Gringuts lifted him into the air; Toothless started to move forwards, looking for a way to not hurt his rider but still interfere. There wasn't time to do anything as Gringuts threw Hiccup back to the ground as hard as he could.

The boy's elbow banged against a rock, and his head narrowly missed one. His ribs ached as Gringuts aimed a kick at them, groaning in pain; and then there was a black blur and a scream.

Hiccup sat up to see Gringuts pinned by his dragon - and Toothless' teeth digging into Gringuts' arm! "Toothless, STOP!" The teeth instantly retracted (gods, the sight of the blood on them made him woozy) but the Night Fury remained on top of the other heir. "Toothless, get off, you're hurting him!"

As much as he hated Gringuts, he didn't want Toothless to maim him.

Toothless looked back at Hiccup, confused, by slowly got off of the Mangy Muttonhead heir. Gringuts gasped for breath and let out a moan of pain, but stood up quickly. "You'll pay for that!" he snarled.

But as Gringuts ran away from the upset rider and dragon, clutching his injured arm, he smiled to himself. Pay for that they would.

\* \* \*

><p>When Hiccup got back to the village on dragonback (after telling the other teens he had to leave) his father was waiting for him in the village Square. Chief Knuck was there too, as was Gothi, who was bandaging Gringuts' arm.<p>

"Care ta explain son?" Stoick said testily, arching an eyebrow.

"Gringuts provoked Toothless," Hiccup said hastily. "Gringuts went after me, and well - you know how protective he is!"

Stoick did, and was grateful for it almost every single day, but this could have been much worse than it was very easily. "Tha' may be son \_"

"Tha' dragon of yers has ta be able ta control itself!" Cheif Knuck said, gesturing wildly with his hands. "It went after my son Stoick, I want it caged! Chained an' shipped off the island!" Breathing heavily, Knuck turned towards Stoick, trying to suppress his anger. Vikings were tough, physical people and if the dragon couldn't handle a little violence, than it shouldn't be allowed to roam freely through the village. He was surprised something like this hadn't happened sooner.

"What?" Hiccup cried, putting a hand on Toothless' neck. "No, you are \_not \_caging Toothless, nobody is taking him anywhere, \_not again!\_" Toothless rumbled reassuringly, trying to comfort him, but it did nothing to stop his stomach from churning with dread. Gods, the disaster that was the Kill Ring was still too soon. The vision of Toothless being wrestled and chained still haunted him, sometimes, on bad nights. He suspected it always would, no matter how many years passed.

Stoick raised his hands, trying to placate his son, who was looking slightly hysterical. "Son, calm down." He placed his hands on Hiccup's shoulder. "Ya need ta get yerself under control, alrigh'?"

Swallowing hard, Hiccup nodded and mumbled, "Alright," but shot a glare at Gringuts all the same.

"Now, ya need ta understand Knuck, tha village owes a \_lot \_ta this dragon an' we are not doin' anything drastic. However," Stoick continued, wincing, "under tha circumstances, it might be wise ta keep Toothless in tha Dragon Academy pens until tha Mangy Muttonheads are off tha island."

Hiccup opened his mouth to protest - that was still almost four days! - but Stoick raised a hand and gave him a meaningful look, so he clamped his mouth shut again.

"An' of course, Gringuts is partially ta blame as well. I'm trustin' tha' ya'll assign a proper punishment fer tha boy, Chief Knuck."

Knuck exhaled loudly as if in disagreement, but after a few moments said, "Aye, I will Stoick." He gave his son a sharp rap on the head; Gringuts reached up to rub in, because that \_hurt. \_"Gringuts, come

wit' me son." The Chief and heir walked off together, towards no where in particular.

Sighing heavily, Stoick turned to Hiccup. "Ya can take him ta tha Academy now." Stoick bent low and whispered only for Hiccup to hear, "I'm sorry son, but we need to keep tha peace. I know Toothless was only doin' it 'cause of ya, great loyal devil he is. I'm sorry."

Hiccup sighed as well. "I know." And he did, he understood, but it did nothing to diminish his anger. What had he ever done to Gringuts anyway? Why was he so determined to ruin his life? His fingers curled into fists.

Hiccup waved his other hand forwards, looking down at Toothless sadly, still angry. "C'mon Toothless," he said bitterly, and practically stomped off.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>####<strong>

Walking to the Kill Ring seemed to take forever. Normally, they would have flown, but that would have greatly sped up the process and Hiccup wanted Toothless to stay out of a cage as long as possible.

Thank Thor the cages for the dragons were actually nicer now. They had been cleaned and expanded. There was even talk of building a huge stable to house all the dragons in a more comfortable living space, but plans for it had only begun and it would take a year at least to build.

Luckily, the Academy didn't have any classes going on this late in the day and was completely empty. Slowly, with his foot and prosthetic feeling heavier than ever, Hiccup walked over to one of the largest and vacant cage. As he put a hand on the lever to open the door, he looked back at Toothless. "I'm so sorry bud," he said, trying to convey all the regret he felt into his voice.

Toothless' features melted into one of reassurance and the Night Fury walked over to bump his arm. His dragon's large green eyes seemed to telling him, \_Hey, it's okay and it's not your fault - it's Gringuts' fault. No one messes with my rider.\_

Despite himself, Hiccup let out a soft chuckle as Toothless continued to nudge his arm and tried to lick his face. "Alright, alright, I get it, you're fine with it, and at least it is only for four days." (Still four days too long. Stupid Gringuts.)

He put his hand on the crown of Toothless' head. "I'll come visit you every day bud," Hiccup promised. "And stay until my dad comes to carry me outta this place."

Toothless rumbled in agreement, but his happiness faded as he prepped himself to walk into the cage. It wasn't as bad as the one he had been shoved in before, after he saved his boy here, but he still wasn't looking forward to it. Dragons weren't meant to be separated from the sky. These next four days were going to be the longest days ever.

Toothless took one last look at the bright blue sky and then walked into the cage, letting out a soft, unhappy moan.

"I know buddy," Hiccup said sadly, sounding as awful as Toothless felt. Some of that emotion must have come off on his face despite trying to hold it in, because that angry spark came back into Hiccup's eyes.

The cage door clanked shut with the Night Fury behind the bars, half the cage cloaked in shadows. Hiccup stuck his skinny arm through the bars and held his palm out; Toothless pressed his snout into the familiar, warm hand.

"I'll try and see if I can get you out of here earlier," Hiccup said. "Chief Knuck is an idiot." Sighing, Hiccup sat down with his back leaning against the bars, Toothless resting his head against the same area.

The sky shifted from blue to pastel pink shot with gold and then navy. Hiccup's stomach growled, but he didn't get up. Instead, he stayed with his dragon. He would come visit Toothless every chance he got, but still, to not have his dragon with him all day was going to be awful.

If there was one thing that was worse than no flying, it was no Toothless. And although he couldn't say it, Toothless thought the same about him. No flying was better than no Hiccup. What if his boy fell? Who would catch him?

Toothless tried to get his snout under Hiccup's arm with difficulty, so his rider stretched his arm back and turned his whole body to the side to do it more comfortably. Purring softly, Toothless opened an eye to look at his boy as he was pet. Slowly, Toothless opened his other eye as well.

Hiccup's stomach grumbled again. "Mmr?" Toothless crooned, eyeing the stomach with concern. That meant humans were hungry, shouldn't his boy go get food?

Hiccup waved his hand dismissively. "Don't worry about it Toothless." The Night Fury snorted; as if, it was his job to worry about his human. He swore he was going to get gray scales early because of that boy. "Besides, I've already missed dinner, so there's no point going anywhere."

"No point eh?"

Hiccup jumped and his head whipped to see his dad striding towards them. "Dad, you scared me!"

Stoick ignored him. "I though' I'd find ya here. Been here all this time?" Hiccup nodded. "I'm afraid ya gotta leave an' get ta bed son, it's late."

"Can't I stay here for the night? I mean, Toothless'll keep me warm and stuff." Hiccup had spent a couple of nights in the Cove when his dad had gone looking to the Nest, and he had been fine. He was fine the other night too. "Just one night." Toothless looked up at Stoick hopefully, his big green eyes begging like a dog's.

Those stupid eyes just made this harder. "I wish ya could Hic'up, but winter's on her way an' it's goin' ta be \_very \_cold tonight; ya know how our weather is," Stoick said reasonably. (Snows nine months of the year and hails the other three may have been an exaggeration, but the weather on Berk really was quite awful.)

Hiccup was a Viking and stubborn though, so Stoick could already tell as his son glanced back at his dragon he wasn't going to budge unless Stoick carried him out. He sighed. "Fine," Stoick relented, "\_one \_night. Ya have ta come get dinner an' extra blankets. I don't wan' ya catchin' hyperthermia again."

Hiccup grinned widely anyway. "Alright, thanks dad!" He sprang up from his seat, looking at Toothless excitedly. "I'll be right back bud!" He scampered away from the arena as fast as his skinny legs could carry him, half-running, half-stumbling.

The sight made Stoick chuckle. "He really is ridiculous ain't he?"

Toothless made a noise of agreement and gave him a look that clearly said, \_You don't know the half of it. \_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

"Well, well, well," a voice said gleefully.

Hiccup opened his eyes sleepily, the sunlight blinding him slightly. Once he had blinked the blurriness away, he looked past the bars he saw Gringuts staring down at him. He couldn't help the groan that came from his mouth; this was just \_great\_.

Toothless' green eyes were looking up at Gringuts, filled with anger, and as always, intelligence. A low, warning growl resonated from the Night Fury. "Go away," Hiccup told the other heir and began to stand up. With visible reluctance, Toothless let him; his dragon obviously wasn't keen to have him near someone who had almost seriously hurt him so soon again.

"Looks like your father caged you too hmm? Can't blame him, honestly." Gringuts smiled at him nastily, but the smile faded when Hiccup only rolled his eyes and barely frowned.

"Never heard anything like that before," Hiccup said sarcastically, giving Gringuts a bored, and tired look. And tired he was, tired of this stupid game Gringuts set up and always won.

He stretched his arms, grunting slightly, and then used the newly-installed lever inside the cage to start to lift the cage's gates. His thin frame easily wormed its way under the gate and then onto the other side, outside of the cage. Toothless moaned sadly and quietly and it took a moment to remind himself he couldn't let his dragon out, no matter how much he wanted to.

Hot, spike of burning anger rippled through him and he glowered at Gringuts. "What are you doing here, anyway? Come to see the wonderful thing you've done? Came to see my dragon \_caged?\_" Hiccup clenched

his fists. "Honestly, I have no idea what the hel I did to you, but if you have a problem with me, that's between you and me, got it? \_Not Toothless. \_He's been through enough because of me."

Hiccup took a step towards Gringuts. "But you wanted this, didn't you? You knew it would get him going."

It seemed like years of anger at Gringuts was breaking over him in constant waves and this - this was the last straw. But he was still surprised when he curled his fist, brought it back and then crashed it into Gringuts' face so hard that the other heir stumbled (only because he was caught off guard, of course.)

Hiccup's wrist stung, but as his anger started to dissipate, he looked up at Gringuts in shock. Man, sometimes he didn't think things through but gods was that stupid! He found he couldn't make himself say "I'm sorry," though, and the words got lost on the way up to his mouth.

Once Gringuts' similar look of shock melted away, it was replaced with anger. "You'll pay for that runt," he shouted and moved forwards. Toothless roared ferociously though, and it was enough to stop Gringuts in his tracks. He knew the blasted Night Fury could get out easily if he wanted to (the metal rings above hadn't been completely repaired) and his arm still hurt; he wasn't going to make a rash decision. No, he needed to handle this situation carefully.

Then, a strange calm expression came across his face. Slowly, casually, he strode forwards, stopping so he was only inches away from Hiccup. "Does your precious dragon know your the reason he can't fly?" he hissed.

Hiccup's defiant expression faded. At it, Gringuts grinned. "Thought not," he said quietly. "You better be careful around me runt, or I may just let that secret slip. Or I could stage another 'accident'. My father won't stand for a dragon that's aggressive against his son, now will he?"

Without another word, Gringuts walked out of the Academy, leaving Hiccup struggling to compose himself, and Toothless warbling worriedly.

Heart heavy with added guilt, Hiccup turned to Toothless anxiously. "Don't worry bud, I'm not going to let anything happen to you." And by the way Toothless' large, trusting and loving eyes looked at him, Hiccup knew the naive dragon believed the promise he wasn't sure he could keep.

(Gods, the Mangy Muttonheads couldn't leave soon enough.)

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Sorry this is late, exams are getting in the way. Two more chapters and we're done Act I, crazy eh? And HTTYD2 in only 9 days!\*\*

\*\*Got to go to an advanced screening of HTTYD2, it, was, FANTASTIC. If you guys want more details, check out chapter 12: A "How To Train Your Dragon 2" review of my story \_Dragon Drabbles. \_\*\*

**\*\*Thanks for all the reviews, favourites and follows. :) Also, if there's some spelling errors, I didn't really have time to look this over and I wanted to get it out to you guys as soon as possible.\*\***

**\*\*See you, hopefully, in two weeks!\*\***

## 6. Storm Clouds

\_ACT I: embers\_

\_5: Storm Clouds\_

\* \* \*

><p>As the island and Hiccup had been expecting, the first storm of winter hit that night. The shutters rattled and the Haddock house was even draftier than usual. Hiccup could still see slivers of the dark sky outside, with snow whirling past furiously.<p>

\_The weather fits my mood pretty well, \_he thought darkly.

Being without Toothless was awful, and it must be so horrible in that stupid cage in the Academy, with the wind howling and all of the snow.

Sighing, he walked back to the dinner table where Stoick was bringing over two bowls of stew. The Chief's bowl was at least twice the size of Hiccup's head. Stoick's brow furrowed. "It's Toothless, ain't it son?"

Hiccup looked up at his dad, scowling. "I can't believe you caged him," Hiccup said furiously.

"Ya know I didn't want ta, but would ya rather go ta war wit' tha Mangy Muttonheads? 'Cause if it escalated, tha's wha' would've happened â€" ya know Vikings," Stoick said, trying to sound sympathetic.

"Stubbornness issues," Hiccup supplied tonelessly. "Yeah, I know."

The knowledge didn't ease the heavy weight in his chest though. Although the anger at Gringuts had come and passed over the course of the day, he found most of the time he couldn't scrounge up any guilt for punching the other heir. Okay, none of the time.

"Keep yer head up son," Stoick said gently, "Toothless'll be out in no time. Now eat, ya need some meat on yer bones."

Now that was a familiar phrase, one he had always hated, but it made him feel better; it was almost comforting, somehow. He picked and played with his stew for a bit, before digging into it.

"An' son, Chief Knuck an' I have been talkin'... an' we think it's best if ya an' Gringuts put this mess behind ya..." Stoick sounded as awkward as he looked, but his mouth was set in a firm line. Hiccup looked up at his father in disbelief.

"There's no way I'm spending any more time around that son of a halftroll, rat eating munge bucket bast-"

"Hic'up, language!"

"Sorry dad," Hiccup mumbled bitterly, lowering his voice. Stoick sighed.

"One day son, yeh'll be Chief. An' so will Gringuts. Yeh'll have ta learn how to git along sooner or later, an' tha sooner tha better. Deal?"

"This conversation is feeling very one-sided-"

"\_Deal\_?!"

Hiccup sighed, rolling his eyes. "Deal," he said miserably. At least tomorrow he would be able to visit his dragon. And, as a surge of anger and guilt ran through him, he would make a self-flying tail for Toothless. He would tell the Night Fury the truth once the tail was done. And then, he would give Toothless the choice to leave or stay, now knowing the truth. His stomach churned at the thought. What if Toothless got mad? What if he flew away and never came back?

Toothless deserved to know. Even if Hiccup had put the moment off, it was eating him on the inside, and he didn't want it to cause a rift. Besides, most of the dragons had been pretty forgiving and hadn't left their riders. He and Toothless had a special bond. They would be okay.

Right?

\* \* \*

><p><strong>####<strong>

"Hey bud," Hiccup walked in the Academy, a large basket of fish on his back. He wobbled slightly under the weight; he had brought extra fish, especially Icelandic cod, Toothless' favourite, to soften the blow of not flying. "Had a good sleep?"

The Night Fury greeted him eagerly at the bars of the pen, giving him a toothless smile. Hiccup set the basket of fish down and pulled the lever of the cage down; slowly, the gate creaked open. Hiccup knocked over the basket with his good foot, and the fish spilled out of it. Toothless eagerly ate the fish up, and Hiccup couldn't help but grin at the sight.

"I need to take your saddle off, make some adjustments," Hiccup explained. He waited until Toothless was done eating before moving forwards to take off the saddle and flight gear. The easiest way to make the new tail was to use the original as a starting point. Toothless let out a soft whine as he closed the cage again and began to walk away, the flight gear bundled up in his arms. "I'm sorry bud," he turned back to his dragon, "but this is important. I'll visit you as soon as I can, okay?"

Toothless was obviously unhappy and moaned to show his reluctance,

but laid down all the same. He placed his head on top of his paws with sad eyes. It took every ounce of Hiccup's restraint to not run back to his dragon. He had to get this done. For Toothless. (Although a part of him wondered how many days their friendship had left.)

The forge was empty - Gobber must have taken the day off to go drinking with some of the other men at the Meade Hall. It was just as well, Hiccup figured; he didn't want to be bothered. Now, it was time for the tail. He started by pulling out his old design, alongside the newest one. It was all willpower, from there.

He set to work.

\* \* \*

><p>After only an hour or two of work, Hiccup found himself interrupted by a loud cough at the door. "What?" he said irritably, whirling around. Stoick stood there, looking awkward in the cramped space and uncomfortable in general.<p>

"Son, Chief Knuck is here wit' Gringuts. It's time fer ya to put this all behind ya." He gave his son a pained look. "Please, Hic'up, behave."

"I will if he does," Hiccup said testily, but followed his father out of the Forge all the same. Chief Knuck had planted a hand on his son's shoulder, which seemed to be all that was keeping Gringuts from running away; Hiccup wished he would. Hiccup simply resigned himself to glaring at Gringuts instead.

"Yer father an' I were thinkin'," Chief Knuck began, "tha' it'd be best to star' this as soon as possible. Diplomatic, civil business." He gave Gringuts a pointed look, especially. "An' the Forge is as good a place as any to... to bond...?" The Chief trailed off feebly. "To put this mess behind us," he added firmly, giving both boys a stern look.

Stoick clapped his own hand on Hiccup's shoulder. "Behave ya two." The two Chiefs walked away from the Forge, casting nervous glances over their shoulders every so often until they were out of sight.

"Look, Gringuts," Hiccup began fiercely, "I'm only tolerating you right now because I \_have \_to, but don't think for a second I'm willing to forget what you did to my dragon."\_><em>

"Speaking of which, where is your dragon, exactly?" Gringuts said, feigning politeness. "Still in the Academy?"

Hiccup narrowed his eyes. "Why do you want to know?"

"You and I both don't want to do this, right? So, what do you say to me going one way and you going the other and if our fathers ask we make up an excuse?" Gringuts did have a point, Hiccup conceded. "And honestly, is it so wrong to be curious about a creature as great as the Night Fury?" There was an oddly hungry gleam in Gringuts' dark eyes.

"Fine, your idea isn't that bad. But as for my dragon, you can find

him yourself."

As Gringuts left the Forge with the Academy as his destination, he smiled to himself. \_Oh, I plan to.\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

"This is a dump they've got you locked in, isn't it Night Fury?" Gringuts sauntered in the Academy. It was empty, so the classes must have either been another day, or were outside of the Ring. Toothless growled as the Muttonhead approached him. "Nah, you won't touch me or you'll get your \_boy \_into trouble. Again. And you don't want to do that, do you?"

Toothless' growls faded, but the dragon still looked murderous. Gringuts smiled smugly. "Thought not."

His eyes roved over the cage, its mechanisms, the exits of the Academy. How the Night Fury's saddle wasn't there; it was grounded. He grinned. Excellent. "Can't fly, hmm?" Toothless' expression didn't change. "You know what they say - a downed dragon is a dead dragon. It's a miracle you're even here, actually. Thank the gods for that. Night Furies are extremely rare. Why, I've ever heard that you're the last one. It must hurt, being alone. I suppose you have the twig, though, so you're not truly alone."

Gringuts leaned in close and leered at the dragon on the other side of the bars. "Don't worry, soon, you will be."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

Two days of work - two more day until the tribes were gone, and now the new tail was finally finished. Hiccup stood back to admire his work, trying to ignore the way his stomach was tying itself into knots. He wanted to go see Toothless, but he didn't think he would be able to handle it without breaking down somewhere. He was just thankful that Gringuts had stuck to their shaky truce and left him alone. Although, he couldn't remember seeing the heir of Chief Knuck around Berk all that much over the past few days. Perhaps that was because he had rarely left the Forge... yes, that must have been it.

Stomach grumbling, Hiccup left the prosthetic tail on his work desk and headed back home to have dinner. He and Stoick often ate in the Meade Hall, seeing as Gobber was the only one who could really cook, but the Chief of Berk had made a special request and Hiccup wasn't about to push the envelope more than he already had. (Or at least not to do so with his father explicitly knowing.)

"Had a good day son?" Stoick grunted, already sitting at the table when Hiccup walked in. He shut the door to his home with some effort, the wind blowing fiercely against it, snow scattering onto the wooden floor before turning to little droplets of water because of the roaring fire in the fire pit.

Hiccup shook himself off of the snow. He took his seat at the table.

It was a relief to be out of cold, and the warmth of the fire was rapidly spreading throughout helped himself to the chicken in front of him.

"Pretty good." Hiccup tried to keep his tone upbeat and cheery. Hopefully, his father's obliviousness to how he was actually feeling would be a good thing for once. "I finished a project I was working on in the Forge. And Gringuts wasn't too bad either," he added.

That last part was a complete lie, but Stoick seemed to buy it. "Good, good," the man said, stroking his beard. "And Toothless?"

Hiccup hastily swallowed the lump that had sprung up in his throat. "He's... doing okay. Antsy, because of no flying you know? I'm feeling restless myself." It was true. He had missed flying so much it had manifested into a stomachache. Whether that was from missing flying or his rapidly growing fear of losing Toothless, he wasn't sure. Either way, in Snotlout's words, 'it totally \_sucked\_.'

"How are the trade negotiations going?" the teenager asked.

"Slowly but surely," Stoick said, letting out a huff of frustration. "Some of the Chiefs don't seem to realize that dragons are companions, not just mindless, endless means of transportation."

Hiccup nodded, frowning. "I can imagine how fun that must be," he said dryly. "Everything's being packed up, though, with the tribes leaving so soon? The first storm of winter will be blowing in any day here."

"Aye," Stoick said heavily. "Chief Knuck even said they might leave early." A small smile grew under his mustache. "Which means Toothless would get out earlier, too."

Hiccup involuntarily grinned. "That's great," he said excitedly. Then, he remembered what that would mean, and his happiness vanished in an instant. He hoped it didn't show on his face and forced a yawn. "Well, I should be getting to bed. Really wore myself out today, so yeah... I'll be going now..." He hurried up the stairs as fast as he could, coming face to face with the slab of rock Toothless always slept on. The sight did nothing to help his mood.

Sighing to himself, the Viking got into bed, but didn't fall asleep for a long, long time.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>#####<strong>

"Hic'up-"

Someone was shaking him. Everything was dark and warm - there was a faint glow. His vision was blurry as he opened his eyes, seeing a candle only a few inches from his nose, clutched in his father's hand. Stoick looked agitated and worried. "Hic'up! Get up son!"

Hiccup sat up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, still disorientated.

"What's going on?" he asked groggily.

"We're under attack, son! A Silent Slayers boat, just off Raven's Point!"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Long time no see. I know, I know, not only is this chapter <em>long <em>overdue, it's much shorter than normal. For that, I am truly sorry. Life got caught up to me, I got swept up into another fandom. I shall never be abandoning this story.  
NEVER.\*\*

\*\*The plot thickens - or rather, I just really wanted to end on a cliffhanger. This chapter didn't have a huge amount plotwise, I guess, but is still important. Next chapter's end of Act I and everything really starts going to hell. I'm excited. You, my dear readers, should be afraid. Very, very afraid.\*\*

\*\*But seriously, I love you guys. Thanks for being patient with me.  
:)\*\*

## 7. Author's Note: Hiatus

\*\*Author's Note:\*\*

\*\*Hi guys, I was hoping I wouldn't have to do this, but I'll be putting this story on hiatus until I'm done with "Dragonheart" (which doesn't have that many chapters left, 6 or 7) and I hope to finish that before summer. I just don't have the time or the inspiration to juggle both of these stories, and as Dragonheart is closer to completion, it makes more sense to put this one on hold.\*\*

\*\*Thank you for all your support and for being patient with me, I really appreciate it. \*\*

\*\*Hope to see you again soon. :)\*\*

End  
file.